

The Metaphysical Playroom: The Puppet Animations of
Stephen and Timothy Quay

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Chapter 1 Introduction

The ability to do this kind of a thing is fundamental in the destinies of the art. . . . Now the mechanical or non-human object, beginning with the engine . . . is apt to be the hero in most any sort of photoplay while the producer remains utterly unconscious of the fact. Why not face this idiosyncrasy of the camera and make the non-human object the hero indeed? Not by filling the story with ropes, buckets, firebrands, and sticks, but by having these four unique. Make the fire the loveliest of torches, the water the most graceful of springs. Let the rope be the humorist. Let the stick be the outstanding hero, the D'Artagnan of the group, full of queer gestures and hoppings about. Let him be both polite and obdurate. Finally let him beat the dog most heroically.

Vachel Lindsay, The Art of the Moving Picture

Years ago in a dank cellar, in the middle of writing a Master's thesis on James Joyce's cinematic language, I watched a screening of the Quay Brothers' Street of Crocodiles (1986). I was immediately enthralled by the beauty of the images, their complexity and musicality and by a baffling narrative structure. Most of all I remember an intense desire to show the film to a friend, Richard Weihe, who was working on Ludwig Tieck and on E.T.A. Hoffman's 'Der Sandmann', because I thought he might be able to explain what it was I was seeing. In an unexpected, circumscribed way, things fell in place--Richard knew the Quays' work and had met them recently in a chance dinner encounter. He encouraged me to go visit them in their London studio and since then, we have shared many memorable times together with the twins.

But I could not pinpoint what was so striking and emotionally moving about the film. I was smitten by its beauty and poetry, but when I tried to describe what I thought was actually happening in the film's convoluted narrative, I was stumped in my attempts to communicate exactly what it was. I found cold comfort in a text from Michael Atkinson: "It wouldn't matter if every man, woman or child on earth saw The Street of Crocodiles. Only I would truly understand it--which is not to say that I literally understand it at all."¹ However, it was encouraging to realise that I was not alone in my inability to describe the film. Unlike most live-action cinema at that time

¹ Atkinson, 1994, p. 36.

(1991), before CGI and digital animation flooded commercial and independent studios, these images and objects brought to life have a different relationship to my lived experience. The best way I could describe it at the time was as a Joycean epiphany, a phenomenon that I implicitly understood but could not adequately describe. I knew it was not possible for a figure constructed out of light bulbs to react to a flickering beam of light any more than it was possible for a collection of screws to mischievously congregate and twirl themselves into in a floorboard. But it was 'there', I saw it. It was a Joycean 'visione animato all'fino de lo scoppio', vision animated to the bursting point, illogical, oneiric and exhilarating.² I am fascinated, yes, by the screws that are 'empowered' and transport themselves off-screen over a stodgy layer of meticulously crafted dust. But what of the screws?

My quizzical epiphany ultimately led to the same starting point, that is described in the epigram to this introduction. Vachel Lindsay's 1919 reflections on the 'special powers of animation--the 'trick film' as it was known in his era--are comments on how personification of inanimate objects is possible using this technique. The viewer of such films, then and now, is confronted with an illogical, yet comprehensible vision of objects that move, have intent, even cunning. This leads to a number of queries this book will address: How could one describe the experience of what we see, feel and understand when watching one of the Quay Brothers' films? Besides the stylistic elegance, what do these images affect in our perception that is different than the filmic actions and dialogues of living, sentient beings? How can a piece of metal be endowed with a gesture that moves us emotionally? In what kind of world can a screw 'live'? Or for that matter, what entails the experiential difference between a screw animated on screen and one that we twirl in our fingers?

Around this time I went to a lecture by Siegfried Zielinski, founding rector and 1994-2000 rector of the Academy of Media Arts Cologne (Kunsthochschule für Medien Köln), of one of Europe's most innovative media schools.³ He introduced his concept of the "an-archaeology" of technological vision. The following two hours were accompanied by images--not of highly developed technology or computer graphics, but slides and transparencies of images out of the 16th to 18th centuries, of Romantic graphic representations of sun spots, cover pages of antique books on the Magiae Naturalis and hand-written lists of prominent and obscure scientists and philosophers who Zielinski deems crucial as forerunners of the current development

² This is the 'technic' Joyce used to describe for the semantic play in 'Circe', an experimental, cinematically stylistic episode of *Ulysses*.

³ Zielinski. 1997, 173-188.

of new media. On his list, Jan Svankmajer and Patrick Bokanowski were two of the artists working in film; and the Brothers Quay were mentioned in a reference to Bokanowski's experimental film L'Ange (1982). They were included in a collective representation of Zielinski's choice of filmmakers who he defined as cinema activists. Zielinski's reference to these four filmmakers in the context of an ahistoricisation of digital media is relevant, in that all of them either incorporate animated sequences into their films or make films that are exclusively animated. They are activists in the sense that they don't simply depict but also challenge conventional representations of reality, and the neat boundaries of media genres.

Perhaps the cinema, and especially the metaphysical potential of animation film, is the art form most able to depict these magical and occult ideas (a melting ice cube filmed in slow motion, and thereafter projected in reverse, animated beams of sunlight). It was no coincidence and there is a deeper relevance in the inclusion of the Quays in Zielinski's choice of filmmakers in a discussion of the origins of vision, its technical and perceptual machinations and its potential use in the media of this century. How does animation film alter the difficult concept of 'cinematic reality'? And what is the attraction of these films for an audience on the whole more accustomed to fictional or documentary representations of external reality, of the world they inhabit physically? These questions touch on ethics and aesthetics of cinema as a whole, and on philosophical discourses around reality and perception. Svankmajer, the Brothers Quay and Bokanowski belong to a community of artists whose works evolve in the consideration of these issues, among others. It is not surprising that the cinematic psychogeographer and variantologist Zielinski is befriended with Griffiths, who introduced the Quays to Zielinski, whom they also call a friend. What they share beyond this is an insatiable curiosity and conviction of the representations of dreams, of 'worlds' and activities in other artistic fields. This rather anecdotal diachrony of events is perhaps one that is shared by others interested in the Quay Brothers films, and this book hopes to unravel some of complex interrelations between their modes of practice that result in an astonishing body of works.

Cinematic Parameters

The technical features of pre-digital animation filmmaking are straightforward and relatively easy to describe. The basic characteristic that all non-digital animated films share is a particular technical use of the film material. Animation film uses the same

photochemical materials as live-action film, and both are projected at rates ranging from 16 to 24 frames per second.⁴ During projection, the viewer sees the same illusion of movement as in films using live-action cinematography. Compared to drawn or painted planar (paper and cel) animation, puppet animation has the differing modes of production, mise-en-scène and technique that have much more affinity with live-action filmmaking and expand the puppet animation filmmaker's palette with visual, spatial and temporal features. A strip of animated film looks the same as does one of live-action film: a series of static images. But only in single-frame animation (including animated sequences in a live action film) does the quality of movement of the artefact itself come into play.⁵ Static arts thus are freed of their immobility through the technique. The profilmic moment of shooting constitutes the inherent difference, and this distinction forms a significant part of my analysis.. The terms object animation, 3D animation and puppet animation are used in this book. All refer to a particular technique of non-computer-generated animation--manipulation of space-filling objects in front of the camera in single-frame shooting. Conventional puppet animation films mainly use one particular type of material and character style, mostly plasticine or latex figures that are animated in built set fragments. In contrast, the Quay Brothers employ almost all the other arts in their puppet animation films: sculpture, architecture, graphics, painting and the time-bound arts of dance, music and literature. Of course, other art forms can also be incorporated in live action films: visual style, set and costume design and perspective are all elements of mise-en-scène and components of visual composition in most films.

The poetic quality of the Quay Brothers' animated images results from a formal combination of editing, focal shifts, lighting, music, sound effects, colour palettes and unusual objects that are placed in unexpected relations within the frame. Four chapters of this book are concerned specifically with technical, aesthetic and formal microanalyses of Street of Crocodiles, a film that I regard as both a nexus, a culmination of the Quays' creative development before 1986 and also a film that anticipates how their work in puppet and live action cinema evolved after this film. Many microanalyses in film studies use a shot-to-shot protocol method as a basis for analysis. It can reveal specific film techniques and authorial decisions made during the course of filming and isolate individual professional roles such as camera, set design and lighting. A protocol also serves as a reference to develop concepts on

⁴ Direct animation directly on clear film stock also employs base materials of film.

⁵ Kinetic sculptures such as those in László Moholy Nagy's films are examples of kinetic art, but the movement is not animated.

aesthetics, style and narrative developments in a film. Although the methods used in a formal, parameter-based film analysis (Bellour, Bordwell, Thompson, Wuss, Burch, Brinckmann et al) can provide complex and rich materials to support observations, puppet animation film poses a particular set of problems when it comes to transcribing an analysis of the cinematic parameters that are technical in nature. In addition to the standard technical and narrative parameters, the fine-arts based materials used in the Quay Brothers' films (and in much other independent animation) require that we determine new profilmic descriptors, taking into account elements of sculpture, texture, dimension, scale and additional fine-art elements. Graphics play an important role both in visual style and in set design as does collage.

The systemised tabling of parametric information does provide an overview and does allow us to 're'-construct the film in its final form. As useful as it is, this information brings with it the danger of assuming that the Quays proceeded with a linear, causal scenario for Street of Crocodiles, which they pointedly declare they did not.⁶ It reveals the technical process of filmmaking, but not the countless decisions and 'mistakes' that the Quays' themselves account as crucial to the finished film. What can be divined from this material is a sense of their preferences and style in cinematic parameters, such as a tendency to use chiaroscuro lighting, or a rapid editing frequency. This kind of analysis is in an extended sense analogous to an autopsy, whereby the innards--the materials and structures and their organisation -- are revealed, but the creative impulse remains conjecture. What I want to describe instead is the experience of watching their works--to disentangle and highlight the formal and technical processes involved to reveal the devices that elicit apprehension and the aesthetic pleasure during viewing. The Quay Brothers' films neither follow the formulae most animation films do, nor do they make use of the many conventions that define more mainstream animation shorts. The borders between individuals are more permeable in independent film that are made with smaller crews: the Quays are credited with almost all creative work on most shorts besides editing and sound, and this implies a much more intimate interrelation between parameters and the artists.

Any discussion of technical parameters implies establishing a set of norms a film adheres to (or not). The subtle differences in obeying and violating particular conventions or norms reveals to what extent a film can be related to other works and also distinguishes a film from them. The Quay Brothers' films often do both-- combining familiarity of certain conventions intermingled with new and

⁶ Quay Brothers interview, 1992.

defamiliarising forms and devices. The mix of familiarity and novelty is part of the attraction of their work, providing cues for the viewer and at the same time confronting her with new and unfamiliar stylistic subsystems that challenge film comprehension. The parameters discussed mirror the devices of the film, revealing aesthetic decisions made by the filmmakers. These can be pre-compositional (influences, sources, emulations, cinematic forms), compositional principles of combination and transformation (and chance discoveries) within a work and post-compositional (effects, reception, varying responses in different contexts).⁷ Besides technical parameters, since puppet animation uses so much artifice (but less than graphic 2D animation) my analytical approach incorporates an interdisciplinarity that reflects on other creative practice. Analysis of and reflection upon a non-conventional film is to some degree guided or influenced by certain attractions and irritations to the film as experienced on screen. In foregrounding certain elements and giving others limited attention, the analysis is not wholly objective, and I my approach makes minimal reference to existing theory, in part because there is as yet not much written on puppet animation. I describe the surface of the films' images and their relation to the sound track in an analysis that centres on description and interpretation.

Chapter Descriptions

A monographic approach to the work of two filmmakers who seldom discern themselves from one another and who in taped interviews continuously augment, extrapolate, and complete each other's statements bears certain implications in the understanding of the term monograph. That the Quays are identical twins is a biological fact; yet their close relationship has definite implications in their aesthetic development, and the richness of their works has its source in two minds working in close concert. I have therefore chosen to approach their work as a synthesis of two individuals whose differences can neither be divined in the images they produce, nor in the interview excerpts that appear here, nor in their own idiosyncratic approach to film making. Each of them has an equally valid if unidentifiable voice in the direction any of their films take during the production process. One result of this is the fact that credits, interviews, articles and almost all other material produced or made available by the Quay Brothers are accredited to both of them; thus a separation of

⁷ These factors are described by R.S. Crane in "Critical and Historical Principles of Literary History", in: *The Idea of the Humanities* vol 2, University of Chicago Press, 1967, pp. 45-156, cited in Bordwell, 1989, in Barton Palmer 1989, p. 376.

them as individuals from their work is almost impossible. For this reason, I will refer in some instances to the Quays as a single voice, as a set of four hands, four ears and eyes, and as an entity that has collectively and modestly continued to produce works of art without an identifiably divisible paradigm of responsibility, recognition or signature.

Following this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 sets forth aesthetic, technological and philosophical parameters for this book's discussion of the particular qualities of the 'worlds' of Stephen and Timothy Quay's films. After an exposition of how the Quay Brothers are and have been positioned by critics it poses some queries about the specific characteristics of puppet animation towards developing a approach appropriate to describing these works, and the Quay Brothers' films in particular. I then introduce the concept of animated 'worlds' and how it can be understood in specifically phenomenological terms, and explain interdisciplinary methodologies and philosophical notions that are invoked in the remaining chapters, followed by chapter descriptions Chapter 3: 'Metaphysical Playrooms' tracks the Quays' early development as artists and filmmakers, structured around a loosely chronological order of film titles up to Street of Crocodiles. It interweaves production histories, biographical events, chance encounters and interrelations and stylistic development in their works made in years between leaving Philadelphia up to Street of Crocodiles. Their producer, Keith Griffiths figures prominently, and his professional trajectory provides insights into his unique aesthetic approach to cinematic production his engagement with them. Chapter 4, 'Palimpsest, Fragments, Vitalist Affinities' undertakes an analysis of the Quays' intimate artistic relationship to the written word and specific genres, beginning with their work in calligraphy, and then moving towards a corpus of publications that are central to their thematics and their unusual cinematic palimpsest style. Specific narrative and stylistic strategies are invoked relative to concepts of metaphor, dream narrative and James Joyce's literary techniques. I then develop a triumvirate of authors--Kafka, Walser, Schultz--articulating their main thematic and philosophical inspirations and how these weave into the Quays' own, followed by a section that isolates motifs and stylistic elements of Bruno Schulz's short story "The Street of Crocodiles" and considers this relation between Schulz's source text and the film's visual surface and experimental narrative structure. Within each of the four following chapters I develop a theoretical and explanatory complex that illuminates functions and devices specific to the Quay Brothers' work, with a particular focus on representative shots and sequences from Street of

Crocodiles. Chapter 5 'Traversing the Esophagus' investigates the relationships between architectural constructions, scale, and materials that create a cinematic world of spatial uncertainty that has material and phenomenal relations to our own world. Chapter 6, "Puppets and Metaphysical Machines" takes on the population of the Quay Brothers' world: the physical properties and animated performances of the puppets and objects that occupy the realm.. It also describes features that are particular to the Quays' puppet construction, and how they respond to Schultz's description of 'generatio aequivoca' a concept that is central to their work. Chapter 7 'Negotiating the Labyrinth' investigates the function of space and how lighting, shot size and camera movement, use of lenses and montage produce new ways of seeing the 'world' that the first two questions describe to finish. Concepts from the previous three chapters are revisited in Chapter 8, 'The Secret Scenario: Soundscapes', that examines the central role that sound, music and noise plays in the Quay Brothers' montage. In recent years, the Quays have made increased forays into works where animation is less prominent.

Chapter 9: 'The Animated Frame and Beyond' investigates the shift in form of the short films, indents and pop promos made after Street of Crocodiles, centering on development of motifs and imagery that originated in the early films and how they accretially develop and are augmented by new ones. The chapter reflects on their increasing engagement with choreographers, opera and stage and set design. The chapter takes into account the filmmakers' ongoing development of musical structures, the animation of light, and looks at the interplay between this art form's particular aesthetics and their permutation in the film's visual style. A section on In Absentia (2000) that describes aesthetic features and devices of the Quays' prize-winning short film and concludes with a focus on The Phantom Museum and four short commissioned films. Chapter 10 'These Things Never Happen but are Always' charts a distinct aesthetic shift to live action directing with an analysis of Quay Brothers' first feature The Institute Benjamenta and the second feature film completed in 2005. Chapter 11 summarises their poetics and offers conclusions.

The Quay Brothers' body of work continues to grow and at the time of writing comprises over 30 films, including two dance films and two feature films, encompassing animated shorts, independent films, commissioned works, advertising, artist documentaries, commercials, and television station breaks (Channel Four, BBC2, MTV).⁸ Commissions include pop videos (a well-known but most un-Quayish collaboration was on Peter Gabriel's Sledgehammer, made in the

⁸ See filmography.

golden 80s of British animation) and pop promos for musicians (Michael Penn, His Name is Alive, Sparklehorse), and others. In recent years, their filmmaking has tended to emphasise their strong interest in choreography and music: Duet (1999) and The Sandman (2000) feature dancers; and although the actress in In Absentia (2000) is not choreographed as such, the light is. Recently completed work includes a dream sequence for Julie Taymor's 2002 feature film, Frida (2001) (it is interesting to note that Taymor has a background as a puppeteer), The Phantom Museum (2002) commissioned by the Wellcome Trust, and four short films as the visual component of a 'Tate and Egg Live' musical performance at Tate Modern, London (2003). The corpus includes three student films, some highlights from their work in commercial advertising, film sequences made for opera, ballet, art installations and stage performances. The following pages reflect on their commissioned and independent puppet animations up to Jenny Jones, includes their feature Institute Benjamenta, Or, This Dream People Call Human Life (1995) and concludes with their second feature film, The Piano Tuner of Earthquakes (2005). The text pivots around Street of Crocodiles (1986), midpoint in their work to date.

Chapter 2 Animated 'Worlds'

Stephen and Timothy Quay's forays into animation filmmaking have resulted in one of the most unique and complex œuvres in cinema. Their films do not fall in the category of industrialised commercial production and are fiercely idiosyncratic. The films are exemplary visual excavations, an alchemical reworking of occluded but recognisable elements from other films and artworks, and is identified by a highly original style and poetic dialectical form. The Quays' films are not for children: they are adult-oriented, complex and experimental, and the experience of watching one of their works differs significantly from what is usually understood by the term puppet animation film. At first glance, their inspirations are eclectic mix of authors and artists: Lewis Carroll, Franz Kafka, E. T. A. Hoffmann, Marcel Duchamp, Michel de Ghelderode, Ladislav Starewicz, Bruno Schulz, Robert Walser, Joseph Cornell, Arcimboldo, Raymond Roussel, Louis-Ferdinand Céline, Adolfo Bioy Casares. On closer scrutiny, these artists and writers share an express interest in metaphysical and undercurrent worlds of the life of objects, with obsession, the fantastic, the banal, the miniature. In the Quay Brothers' films, these authors become retrieved ghosts hovering out of frame, frames invested with their metaphysical afterlife of omnipotence, epiphany, sensuality and fantasy. The Quays also engage with other undercurrents, whether Emma Hauck's frenzied, repetitive handwriting inspired In Absentia or the schizophrenic texts and musical paintings of Adolf Wölfli (a Swiss peasant committed to an institution who rigorously drew, wrote, painted and composed until his death).¹ Even these misunderstood Art Brut 'authors', unaware of an audience (or fiercely obsessed with one in their imaginations) slip into the Quay Brothers' films.

The Quays' affinity for music-led imagery seems to be compacted into the graphic stylisation and mouldered textures of their films which, in turn, become visual lyrics themselves--a poetic cinematic language. Besides literary and poetic texts, the films are also brimming with formal cinematic references to filmmakers working in animation and in cinematic genres that meld elements of Surrealism, Impressionism, poetic film, experimental film and non-narrative strategies in their works. Naming Robert Bresson, Andrei Tarkovsky, Aleksandr Dovzhenko or Akira Kurosawa as filmmakers they feel closely aligned to, the Quay Brothers' work is often

¹ See reproduction of Emma Hauck's letter to her husband in Beyond Reason. Art and Psychosis. Works from the Prinzhorn Collection, p. 94.

compared to (and programmed with) films from David Lynch, Guy Maddin, or Peter Greenaway. These themes bring us closer to essential queries about how they are transmuted into the Quay Brothers' works--how to grasp, interpret and understand the perceptual experience of the properties of puppet animation that allow us to 'see' these themes in a world of objects that do not act nor are acted upon outside the cinematic realm.

Through the Critics' Eye

In the foreword to the 1997 translation of Mitry's The Aesthetics and Psychology of the Cinema, Brian Lewis suggests how personal engagement drives the critic:

At the center of any critical theory lies a fundamental experience to which a critic remains devoted deep in his or her heart, a "what if" or "how come" or "why" experience, which goes on to generate a life's work of observation, rationalization, intellection, and theory. Underneath it all Jean Mitry was driven by the "wow" experience. He loved the experience of sitting in front of the screen. He loved the movies.

Driven by the "wow", Mitry endeavoured to explain the "why," "what if," and "how come": Why the world on screen was so compelling. Why, when leaving the theater, life could seem so pale and flat. Which films gave us this experience. Which films failed and why.²

Critics reacted to this 'wow' of the Quay Brothers' first films, and many were not animation specialists--rather, they were versed in art house and live-action filmmaking. Tracing the professional biographies of these critics, many of them were heavily engaged in professions and fields other than cinema criticism: directors (Chris Petit and Peter Greenaway), art historian (Roger Cardinal), poet and librettist (J.D. McClatchy), media activist, professor, lecturer (Zielinski, Ian Christie, Raymond Durnat) translator, Surrealist critic, novelist (Paul Hammond, Steve Weiner). It is also indicative of the creative network their producer Keith Griffiths garnered since entering the world of film production--as an engaged producer, he knows most critics personally. His policy "has always been to get free marketing by winding up

² Lewis, Foreword to Mitry, 1997, p. vii.

the critics to see the films."³ Griffiths, unlike many producers, is engaged with the films beyond the end of production.

Most authorship to date on the Quay Brothers' films concentrates on their visual surface and the rich intertextuality that interweaves writers, artists and music and results in their unmistakable style. The emphasis on the surface is due to the abundant aesthetic references in the films, ranging from Renaissance theories of optics to Leopold Sacher Masoch, from the hermetic boxes of Joseph Cornell and anguished, anonymous Art Brut objects to Hieronymus Bosch and Giuseppe Archimboldo, from Surrealism, German Expressionism and Impressionism to Kafka and Walser, Jorge Luis Borges and Adolfo Bioy-Casares, from Igor Stravinsky and Karl Heinz Stockhausen to Sparklehorse, from Expressionist architectures to André Breton's romantic ruins. The well-informed critic responds to the embedded motifs and homages, no doubt motivated by the unusual opportunity to express their own breadth of knowledge in a single journalistic text. The Quays' own favourite definition by a critic of their work remains Paul Hammond's 1986 'nudged nature morte'.⁴

Reading critics' writings on the Quays' works, the 'wow' experience seems to have motivated many of them. Ultimately, they are an initial attempt to grasp what a film is 'saying' to its audiences--they can also be regarded as a first critical inquiry towards establishing more specific and detailed approaches to their films. In his sensitive, critical and self-reflexive analysis of the problematic status of writing about film, Paul Coates suggests that:

[t]he film critic must be in perpetual transit between specialisations, duplicating in himself the multiple authorship ascribed to the medium. Ambitious work in film is almost always fruitfully incoherent, arousing the will to speculate, and requires theoretical, hypothetical ..understanding.⁵

And since popular readership differs from that of scholarly informed publications, a critic has, in a sense, a greater freedom to move from the 'wow' and be able to muse about the 'mmm...' that some films inspire. In articles on the Quay Brothers' films, certain rhetorical forms are taken on by later critics, and as more and more articles are written on a particular film, the rhetoric changes. Looking for the 'why', 'what if'

³ Griffiths interview, 2003.

⁴ Quay Brothers interview, 1996.

⁵ Coates, 1985, p. 9.

and 'how come' that Lewis suggested, many of these early texts delve deeper than descriptive admiration, more so than many other animation film reviewers.

Besides a plethora of popular commentaries, newspaper reviews, festival catalogue texts and programme notes, most of which appeared in the 80 and 90s, academically inclined critical writings on the Quays' films position them in the context of experimental, Surrealist, art house and auteur film making. What weaves this writing into a particular tapestry is an almost unanimous avowal of the seductive qualities of the visual surfaces of the films. After 1990, the Quays were engaging with features and set design and their production concentrated more heavily on commercials, pop promos and channel idents, the latter two often being the trying ground for the imagery and mood they were developing for and which ultimately was refined in Institute Benjamenta. Fortunately, besides the many short articles and reviews that have been written about the Quay Brothers' films in many languages throughout the world, some authors have engaged in closer and lengthier analyses. The 1990s produced several noteworthy essays that contextualise the many themes that film critics invoke. Central to a number of them are psychoanalytic discourse, critical theory, architectonic features, and surrealism. In 1997 the irregularly published BFI publication PIX featured a beautifully illustrated section on the Quays by Nick Wadley, including an essay, film reviews and an interview with the twins. There was also a bonus in this volume: an essay on sound by the Quays' collaborator Larry Sider reflects upon working on Institute Benjamenta. In Jayne Pilling's animation studies anthology, Steve Weiner's terse, analytical piece on Little Songs of the Chief Officer of Hunar Louse, or, This Unnameable Little Broom (1985) traverses mythology, technical description and psychoanalytic theory. And a whole host of excellent film reviews and profiles have appeared in journals and trade publications.

In an article on Quick-time movies, "Nostalgia For A Digital Object", that appeared in the Fall 1999 issue of Millennium Film Journal, Sobchack compares these ephemeral internet films with the experience of Joseph Cornell's boxes and with the Quay Brothers' works.⁶ Although the essay is not specifically about their films, this is one of a number of cinema studies essays that mentions the Quays in a context that doesn't necessarily focus on the fact that their films are animated. Much more, it deals with aesthetics and the experience of their images. Similar texts can provide starting points for developing more specific, interdisciplinary queries into their films. Laura Marks' fascinating Touch. Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media (2002)

⁶ Sobchack, 1999.

has a chapter on Institute Benjamenta. Although the essay aims to argue for the olfactory qualities of the film, she discusses the animated sequences briefly, mostly pointing out their exquisite detail and odours they evoke.

The multi-lingual scholar looking for writings on the Quays is also well served with a number of publications produced for special screening events and festivals.⁷ Stephen e Timothy Quay, which came out for the Bergamo Film Meeting 99, includes a collection of essays (in Italian) written over the years by some of the Quay Brothers' best critics and collaborators. Some are translations from previously published English texts (including Greenaway 1986, Atkinson 1994, Wadley, 1997). Three engage with music and sound (Wadley, Larry Sider and Ermanno Comuzio) providing new insights into the Quay's scores and soundtracks. Other publications sometimes include translations or synopses in English. A lovely example of this is the monograph that appeared at the 2001 Sitges International Film Festival, introduced by Paul Hammond. It features a sensitive and eloquent essay by Jordi Costa that interweaves biography, interpretation, and analysis throughout a phenomenologically tinged response to their films.⁸ Festival catalogues are also a useful resource, mostly for general information, filmographies and reviews. Critical texts that engage with the Quays are also available in a variety of disciplines and media formats that mirror the wide range of creative practice they reflect upon in developing their projects. Besides cinema studies, essays are available in publications serving diverse communities of architecture, fine arts, music, dance and theatre.

Though unreliable and ephemeral, many internet sites refer to a core of about 15 key sites that have articles, filmographies, DVD and VHS sources, Quick-time movies and other information on the Quays. They are useful for finding international newspaper and cultural critic reviews. There is also a significant internet fan base for the Quay Brothers' films, a source of differing enthusiasm, comprehension and fascination the Quays' films incite:

I would LOVE to see the quay brothers get together with someone like h r giger or maybe those people that animated nightmare before christmas! imagine a full length film of quay animation visuals! maybe david lynch could direct it!⁹

⁷ Whilst the Quay Brothers' films are especially popular in Japan, this review will not reflect on Japanese publications

⁸ Costa, 2001.

⁹ Comment posted by aeron, Deussing, 1996.

On the same website 'Frankly' responds:

At the risk of sounding like a snob, I wish more people would go to Europe and live there for awhile to get out of their "American viewpoint." I'm sure they would realize the blasphemy in the suggestion of merging Giger and/or Burton with the Quays. It's that sort of approach to art in America that has prevented the Quays from working here to begin with. That's why they are ex-patriots."¹⁰

This email exchange on a site preceded by an interview with Ryan Deussing and the Quays for the ThingReviews in 1996 is representative of the heterogeneous and eclectic mix of viewers and admirers the Quays attract.¹¹ Whether their viewers are culturally and aesthetically informed or not, the Quay Brothers' films continue to prompt praise and polemics.

As the Quays turned to larger projects, it became relatively quiet for a time in terms of film criticism, because they were making less shorts and more involved in collaborating with choreographers on dance films, creating set designs and preparing their second feature film project. In an interview with André Habib, they were asked if they read critics' writings on their work:

Sometimes, yes, because we learn things too. We're not writers but we respect writing. I think people often take things too far. It's very hard to write about the intangible, to find a way to write more musically. You have to suggest and not just hammer nails into a subject, give it a category, fit it into a nomenclature. We do it ourselves in a certain way, but you have to know when to hold back and let it speak for itself. Knowing how not to know, to a certain degree.¹²

Later writings try to offer some explanation of Lewis' 'wow' by providing some interpretations of the 'why' and the 'what if?' This includes background information on the Quays, on their aspirations and inspirations, or on how their films relate to a larger community of art house filmmaking. Add to this the aesthetics and critical

¹⁰ Comment posted on Deussing, 1996

¹¹ HR Giger is best known for his biomechanical, primordial, menacing (and Oscar-winning) set design for *Alien* (1979), directed by Ridley Scott, Tim Burton for his surreal, almost cartoon-like sets and characters and Stuhr's pop promo *Sober* (1993) emulates the Quay Brothers' lighting and set design.

¹² Habib, 2001.

theory and with technical parameters of camera, set design, mise-en-scène, lighting or sound that graduate students and academic authors engage with, then curiosity begins to evolve for the 'why' and 'how' of their particularly compelling world that this book hopes to satisfy.

The 'Special Powers' of Film

Theory is a flyover that arches above the dilemma of the film critic. It occupies a privileged place among film-goers because theorizing is what one does in the barren intervals between good films: once one's enthusiasm for the last work has died down, one finds oneself stranded in an imageless wilderness, and, left with nothing to think about, one begins to think abstractly.

Paul Coates, The Story of the Lost Reflection. The Alienation of the Image in Western and Polish Cinema, 1985

Coates' idea of a barren interval might have been the motivation for starting this book--as the Quays turned to feature film making and commercials, the short films were fewer and far between. Starting to think theoretically about the Quay Brothers' films did not take place in Coates' 'imageless wilderness', I was barraged by them and seeing many other very good films and works of art, discovering all kinds of relationships between them and the Quays that gave the unarticulated musings substance. More importantly, I realised that as is often the case with films that present intertextuality and interdisciplinarity, I needed to consider other forms of creative practice. Most of the Quay Brothers' work belongs within a loose-knit, cross-discipline auteur network that is identified by a poetic and hybridised form of cinema. In a 1986 interview, drawing a distinction between commercialism and creativity, Gilles Deleuze responded to a question about the crisis around the concept of the cinematic auteur:

A work of art always entails the creation of new spaces and times (it's not a question of recounting a story in a well-determined space and time; rather, it is the rhythms, the lighting, and the space-times themselves that must become the true characters. . . . A work of art is a new syntax, one

that is much more important than vocabulary and that excavates a foreign language in language.¹³

Critics have grappled with a new syntax, with the innovative visual language that is created by the melding of the Quays' excavations of the histories of cinema, literature, art, music, performance and architecture. Animation is one of the most self-reflexive forms of cinema (structural film aside). When we watch it, we are constantly reminded of the process, conscious of the artisanal qualities of what we see. In his concept of historical film poetics, Bordwell alludes to the Greek word *poiêsis*, or active making.¹⁴ I contend that non-digital animation is the most 'actively made' kind of film in that every single frame requires creation and manipulation of the profilmic materials used to create them. One of the challenges of working with animation film is finding an approach that is in fact specifically relevant to the film or films in question. Animation in any of its techniques is at least one step removed from any kind of mimetic activity. Even the 'hyperrealism' of Disney's narrative style belongs in inverted commas, since it is a graphic interpretation, not a photographed representation. Thus any application of theory developed for live-action film will also be one step removed. It is possible only through analogy, through interdisciplinary approaches and by narrowing the analysis in question to issues of figure, narrative or other elements that refer to the actual image and to artistic intervention, concept and related art forms. The main emphasis of this book is to explain how the Quay Brothers' films create visual neologisms in the particular animated space-times that are the true 'characters' of the films.

Animation has long been a significant techno-aesthetic means to negotiate a seamless inclusion of subjective states, fantasy, delirium and other-worldliness into the cinematic illusion of fictional realism. Because the Quays present us with poetic realms that take place in extant spaces, as distinct from drawn or painted ones, the project of a formal and aesthetic evaluation of their works became increasingly entangled in philosophical and phenomenological debates on cinema. The aesthetic representation of 'worlds', imaginary or otherwise, through cinematography is thematised in philosophical, cognitive and psychoanalytic discourses with impact on almost all areas of the humanities. I have considered elsewhere how authors deal with animation when they refer to it in the context of other discussions not specific to

¹³ Deleuze, 1986, cited in Flaxman, 2000, p. 370.

¹⁴ Bordwell, in: Palmer, 1989, p. 371.

animation and critiqued the queries they raise.¹⁵ These examples do identify key questions that, while often unanswered, provide fertile ground for the deeper investigation into how these questions apply to animation. They are also indicative of the troubling nature of the underdeveloped 'language' prevalent in animation studies. One that remains particularly stimulating is a passage in a new section of the enlarged edition of Stanley Cavell's philosophical enquiry into the ontology of film, The World Viewed (1979). Cavell responds to Alexander Sesonsky's criticism (included in this response) brought against his text that is worth citing here at length. Cavell:

[T]here is one whole region of film which seems to satisfy my concerns with understanding the special powers of film but which explicitly has nothing to do with projections of the real world--the region of animated cartoons. If this region of film counters my insistence upon the projection of reality as essential to the medium of the movies, then it counters it completely. Here is what Sesonske says about cartoons (he is thinking specifically of Disney's work, which is fair enough: if any cartoons are obviously to be thought of as movies, even to the point of containing stars, these are the first candidates):

[Sesonske:] neither these lively creatures nor their actions ever existed until they were projected on screen. Their projected world exists only now, at the moment of projection--and when we ask if there is any feature in which it differs from reality, the answer is, 'Yes, every feature'. Neither space nor time nor the laws of nature are the same. There is a world we experience here, but not the world--a world I know and see but to which I am nevertheless not present, yet not a world past. For there is no past time at which these events either did occur or purport to have occurred. Surely not the time the drawings were made, or the frames photographed; for the world I know and see had not yet sprung into existence then. It exists only now, when I see it; yet I cannot go to where its creatures are, for there is no access to its space from ours except through vision.¹⁶

¹⁵ Buchan, 2005.

¹⁶ Alexander Sesonske, cited in Cavell, 1979, p. 167-68

Each of these remarks is the negation or parody of something I claim for the experience of movies. But of course they do not prove my claims are false except on the assumption that cartoons are movies, and that, therefore, what I said about movies, if it is true, ought to apply to cartoons in the way it applies to movies. But on my assumption (which I should no doubt have made explicit) that cartoons are not movies, these remarks about their conditions of existence constitute some explanation about why they are not."¹⁷

Sesonske's rebuttal on how animation differs from reality is especially interesting. He is of course referring to drawn animation, as Cavell notes above. Disney's works have often been described as fictional hyperrealism and as exhibiting a style of animation that comes closest to a depiction of reality (shadows, anthropomorphism, scale and perspective). Sesonsky continues, however, by saying that "[t]here is a world we experience, but not the world." Cavell calls cartoons a 'region' of film that completely counters his insistence on the projection of reality as essential to the medium of movies. In other words, Cavell seems to consider cartoons (no mention of object animation) as not belonging to the domain of his conception of cinema, and he puts forth that maybe we can't consider them as films at all.

But Cavell's concern is with 'reality'. His explanation of the 'region' of cartoons and his reasoning as to why they do not belong to film is closely bound to his own philosophical conceptions of reality. In terms of the profilmic materials of cartoons, drawings that represent ideas through graphic composition, colour and style, then the 'reality' of these drawings is their material base--paper, cell or otherwise. What Cavell seems to skirt is that the cinematic apparatus enables movement and the experience of these drawings as a 'reality' particular to the 'region' of animation. I take this debate a step further to address what the 'special powers of film' could be in puppet animation. If 2D animation has nothing to do with projections of the real world, then what needs to be considered when the image is shot with objects from the real world that occupy space and forms we can access? There are, as well, different realities that have to be taken into account. Cavell's perception of reality is different from mine and from any other spectator in the cinema. There is consensus between philosophers on different definitions of reality, but, in a discussion of animation film, we need a more precise definition of what Cavell means by 'a region', and what Sesonske means by 'a world'. The Quay Brothers' puppet films present

¹⁷ Cavell, 1979, pp. 167-168.

'real' spaces (sets) in the cinematic illusion, not drawn ones, and the idea of an animated 'realm' created by the technique is central to my argument.

Animated 'Worlds'

Dudley Andrews' questioning of 'worlds' elegantly joins these disparate threads:

What exists beyond the [film] text and what kind of description can be adequate to it? Here we encounter the exciting and dangerous term "world". A film elaborates a world which it is the critic's job to flesh out or respond to. But what is this cinematic world?¹⁸

What Andrew considers 'exciting and dangerous' is exactly what attracts and is daunting at the same time: to describe the experience of the 'worlds' of the Quay Brothers' films through a framework that takes into account the 'lived' experience of the films. In terms of ways to approach the experience the Quays' animated 'worlds,' Andrew's formulations on the usefulness of experiential, phenomenological approaches to cinema, the spectator and "the constitution of a cinematic world"¹⁹ are helpful, as are a set of the issues and terms he considers relevant for his project. The oppositions in content between each element of these pairs of approaches (read horizontally) also informs the shift in cinema studies towards 'enabling' the spectator and freeing individual films from corseted analyses based on systems, communication models and the idea that objectivity is required.²⁰

STRUCTURALISM/SEMIOTICS

Explanatory
Synchronic (System)
Enddistanced (objective)
Research Attitude
(Rhetoric) Communications Model
Analytic (Revolutionary)
Repositioning the Text

PHENOMENOLOGY

Descriptive
Diachronic (Origins)
Immersed (Experimental)
Research Attitude
(Art) Expression Model
Synthetic (Revelatory)
Repositioning the Self

My methods align for the most part with the right-hand column. Because animation film has so much to do with the spectator's imaginative engagement with worlds that

¹⁸ Andrew, 1974, p.47.

¹⁹ Andrew, 1978, p. 49

²⁰ Ibid., p. 45.

he/she cannot experience otherwise, except perhaps in imaginative fantasy, an emphasis on personal experience is essential. As Andrew suggests:

Phenomenology is useful in that it relies on personal experience and avoids generalisations and codes that have been used to categorise cinema that . . . must not retard the far more pressing tasks of describing the peculiar way meaning is experienced in cinema and the unique quality of the experience of major films.²¹

In a sense, this shift (in which phenomenology plays a significant role) 'gives the film back' to the viewer and allows the critic more freedom. Maurice Merleau-Ponty's description of phenomenology as something that describes rather than explains also influenced my methodologies that are based primarily on analysis of artistic style. Despite the renaissance of phenomenology in cinema studies, heralded by Vivian Sobchack's philosophically dense and rich The Address of the Eye. A Phenomenology of Film Experience (1992), as yet, surprisingly few authors have embraced this approach in animation studies.²² Sobchack explains the effectiveness of phenomenological approaches to cinema experience:

Prereflective experience is neither verbal nor literary, and yet the goal of phenomenology is to describe experience. Experience comes to description in acts of reflection: consciousness turning reflexively on itself to become conscious of consciousness. And it is in reflection that experience is given formal significance, is spoken and written . . . Experience, nonetheless, seeks and is fulfilled by language even as language and experience are categorically incommensurable. This is something all marginalized peoples recognise. They desire a "new" language that will articulate the specificity of their experience, and the struggle to find the grounds on which they can speak it.²³

Sobchack sees the appeal of phenomenology in "its potential for opening up and destabilizing language in the very process of its description of the phenomena of

²¹ Ibid., p. 46.

²² Joanna Bouldin (2000) has expanded on central notions in relation to 2D animation, and students react very positively to her text

²³ Sobchack, 1992, p. xvii.

experience."²⁴ "Opening up and destabilizing" echoes Deleuze's earlier comment that "[a] work of art is a new syntax, one that is much more important than vocabulary and that excavates a foreign language in language."²⁵ This is a central notion in my analysis that proposes how formal elements and functions in the Quay Brothers' films excavations and reworkings destabilise our expectations of conventional cinematic language, and of animation in particular.

In his book that skilfully outlines the problems film presents for philosophy, Ian Jarvie contemplates the experience of film phenomenologically: "The attraction of the film to the viewer / listener is not a case of delusion. It is voluntary illusion."²⁶ This voluntary illusion is an especially essential requirement for watching animation films.

In sum, we can use film to face and face down the metaphysical problem of appearance and reality. How do we know we are not prisoners in [Plato's] cave? Answer: we do not know; it is a hypothesis, a hypothesis we keep constantly before our mind by testing our sense of reality. By confronting ourselves, that is, playfully, with the seemingly real and thereby limning the boundary-line between the real and the unreal."²⁷

The Quay Brothers' puppet animation films are made using materials that, like in live action, as materials, are what they represent photoindexically. Because they are extant in the 'real' world, their proximity to the real is closer, and the boundary line Jarvie describes is much more permeable with the real than the one between drawn, painted, 2D animation and the real world. In this way, phenomenology is relevant to understanding the film-going experience of a type of film that 'animates' inanimate materials, because it transcends the empiricist practice of proposing psychological assumptions for human experience. Puppet animation evokes so many diverse phenomena in its reception that have little to do with our experience 'in-the-world', but that are presented as being 'of this world'. The Quays' works address a number of issues that Sobchack invokes, yet not in the sense that they confirm or illustrate what she proposes to pursue. Rather, what becomes evident in her phenomenology of viewing experience is the insistence on the relation between what we see on screen

²⁴ Ibid., p. xviii.

²⁵ Flaxman, 2000, p. 370.

²⁶ Jarvie, 1987, p. 54.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 55.

and consequences for the material basis of our lived experience. Again, there is reference to a world:

Watching a film is both a direct and mediated experience of direct experience as mediation. We both perceive a world within the immediate experience of an "other" and without it, as immediate experience mediated by an "other." . . . As viewers, not only do we spontaneously and invisibly perform these existential acts directly and as our selves in relation to the film before us, but these same acts are coterminously given to us as the film, as mediating acts of perception-cum-expression we take up and invisibly perform by appropriating and incorporating them into our own existential performance; we watch them as a visible performance distinguishable from, yet included in our own.²⁸

I will expand this argument by asking the question: What is the immediate experience of an 'other' if it is a puppet? It is not immediate, because it has been doubly mediated, through the director and through the technique of stop motion. How do we perform these mediating acts into our own existential performance? Puppet animation allows us to take up and invisibly perform the experience of omnipotence which is otherwise not part of our external world, but resides much more in a supersensible, inner world that is experienced, but not embodied as such.

My project also reacts to Sobchack's undertaking "to describe and account for the origin and locus of cinematic signification and significance in the experience of vision as an embodied and meaningful existential activity."²⁹ I will tentatively pursue a related goal, namely an interrogation of the experience of viewing--and listening to--the Quay Brothers' animated cinema and its meaning for those who enjoy, are disturbed or otherwise moved by it. Mitry offers an argument I will challenge:

These [cinematic] forms are . . . as varied as life itself and, furthermore, one hasn't the knowledge to regulate life, neither has one the knowledge to regulate an art of which life is at one and the same time the subject and object.

Whereas the classical arts propose to signify movement with the immobile, life with the inanimate, the cinema must express life with life

²⁸ Sobchack, 1992, p. 10-11.

²⁹ Ibid., p. xvii.

itself. It begins there where the others leave off. It escapes, therefore, all their rules as it does all their principles.³⁰

In animation, one does indeed have the (technical) knowledge to not only regulate life, but to also create a semblance of it, as do the Quay's animistic invocations of matter, matter that 'lives' and moves. I will describe in more detail how their animated cinema (and indeed, that of others) challenges Mitry's demand that cinema 'express life with life itself', because it creates an illusion of life without living organisms.

Phenomenology is also relevant when trying to articulate the film-going experience of a type of film that evokes many diverse phenomena in its reception that have little to do with our experience 'in-the-world' or with "life itself", phenomena created by technical means, but a technical means that creates opportunities for perceptual experience that, we will see, are rooted in philosophical notions of vitalism, that takes cause with the phenomena that cannot be explained by their material/mechanical origins.³¹ Sobchack makes a statement on the properties of cinematic expression as viewed by Jurij Lotman:

The development of technology allows for more, rather than less, perceptive and expressive activity in its relation to an envisioned world, to a visible world, and to other visionary, viewing, and visible subjects. The result of this increased possibility for perceptive and expressive choice is an increased possibility for perceiving and expressing meaning, for sign production. Cinematic language is thus expanded in its paradigmatic and syntagmatic possibilities for selection and combination.³²

The perceptive choice-making within the context of a world that Sobchack describes is enriched with new paradigms and sign production in animation filmmaking, because its techniques to create choices in cinematic representation create new cinematic language and transform the illogical and idiosyncratic subjectivity of imagination into a cinematic representation of the same. Endless possible 'worlds' can be envisioned and visually represented, each of them unique and often with little or no relation to the phenomenal world that surrounds us.

³⁰ Mitry, 1965, pp 453-454, in Sobchack, 1992, p. 5. Translation Sobchack.

³¹ I thank David Surman for introducing me to these concepts.

³² Sobchack, 1992, p. 249.

As the Quay Brothers' films privilege intertextuality and interdisciplinarity, the films' 'worlds' are informed by manifestations of other forms of creative artworks. The recourse to phenomenology as a philosophical practice used to describe the phenomena of experiencing animation film is also promising because it is a practice that engages with all types of experiential phenomena, and for my project the experiences of literature, art, architecture and sound are essential. In order to articulate the aesthetic complexity that defines the Quays' style, forays into other disciplines are necessary to explain the many artistic media that come into play in their films. Due to the fine-arts base of other techniques and styles of other kinds of animation, it is also an issue for inquiry into these forms as well.

Nelson Goodman has suggested that "problems concerning the arts are points of departure rather than of convergence."³³ His comment predates a similar assertion made by Gilles Deleuze, that

[t]he encounter between two disciplines doesn't take place when one begins to reflect on another, but when one discipline realises that it has to resolve, for itself and by its own means, a problem similar to one confronted by the other."³⁴

The discipline of animation studies is riddled with what amounts to an avoidance of resolving the 'problem' of animation within the larger scope of cinema studies. It has long been informed by discourses that lean weakly on cinema theory without much attempt at a definition of the problem, that I suggest is partly the innate difference between live-action and animation film that animation studies tries to articulate. Deleuze goes on to suggest "The only true criticism is comparative (and bad film criticism closes in on the cinema like its own ghetto) because any work in a field is itself imbricated within other fields".³⁵ The marginalisation of animation studies is often referred to as just this type of 'ghetto'--the field has examples of 'bad criticism' precisely because it has failed to be rigorously comparative. Many texts on animation do not take essential queries about the intertextual and interdisciplinary nature of animation into account and contribute to the problem of animation scholarship's slow integration into film studies.

Deleuze's suggestion bears comparison with Noël Carrolls's stimulating and polemical call to "piecemeal theorizing" that informed the 1990s 'turn' in film studies,

³³ Goodman, 1976, p. xi.

³⁴ Flaxman, 2000, p. 367.

³⁵ Ibid.

to develop alternate research strategies that help avoid production of theory applicable 'across the board', serving instead to help specify particular problems in approaches to cinema:

As compelling answers are developed to small-scale, delimited questions, we may be in a position to think about whether these answers can be unified in a more comprehensive theoretical framework.

The considerations here on behalf of piecemeal theorizing are practical, but philosophical. For it is my hunch that we do not yet know enough to begin to evolve a unified theory, or even the questions that might lead to a unified theory.³⁶

Carroll's informal yet challenging speculations on how film theory should best evolve are very close to my own convictions about developing critical and analytical contexts for animation film through interdisciplinary, interpretative and comparative approaches, which are the methods used in this book. They provide the necessary framework for describing the process and features of the Quays' complex inter-working of artistic and stylistic creativity that allows me to explore the Quay Brothers' films, and Street of Crocodiles (1986) in particular, as a haunting, elaborate, fascinating exemplary body of work of auteur animation. Besides trying to define a 'problem' of puppet animation through its points of departure from other cinematic forms, other animation techniques, and, indeed, from other art forms, this book also seeks a reconciliation: to alleviate the tangential treatment that academic study of this particular cinematic form has suffered from.

Very little specific investigative, formal or aesthetic research has been carried out on puppet animation. There is a paucity of detailed formal analyses and critical, analytical texts mainly focus either on the works of Jan Svankmajer, Ladislav Starewich or on commercial puppet animation. I eventually found a complimentary approach that not only allows me to retain the microanalysis I feel is essential to reveal the unique artistic qualities of this film, and its resonances with other Quay films, but one that also seemed to touch directly upon phenomenological approaches. My analyses, with a few exceptions, uses models of art instead of communications models, are transtextual, heuristic, descriptive and explanatory in essence. Ultimately I attempt a thematic, conceptual and praxis-based stylistic poetics specific to the Quays puppet animation. Andrew's suggestion, that

³⁶ Carroll, in: Bordwell and Carroll, 1996, p. 58.

phenomenological approaches 'reposition the self' instead of the text, means that the spectator will be foregrounded in my analysis.³⁷

Animation can display sets of semantic fields which are shared by live-action film, and indeed, recent academic authorship on animation uses these fields and methods and theories that are contemporary currency in film studies (semiotics, semantics, gender and cultural studies). North American research tends to focus on commercial and conventional 2D animation with social, political and/or ideological themes. Although most semantic fields, clusters and doublings and their relative theories can be applied to animation, the social, ideological and philosophical basis for such fields are difficult to identify in the 'worlds' some of the Quay Brothers' films present, worlds are not aligned to a specific ideology. My analysis mostly aligns to interpretation, synthetic evaluations that rely on experience and are inductive, developed from a set of questions that provide the viewer with new skills that may assist understanding the work.³⁸ I contextualise development of the Quays' stylistic excess as their praxis progresses, because understanding this excess relies, in part, on knowledge of its manifold artistic and literary references. With extensive focus on Street of Crocodiles, chosen as an exemplary film midpoint in their short film oeuvre that shares many aesthetic and formal qualities with earlier and later work, my analysis teases out the formal defamiliarising effects and illuminates the transformation of Bruno Schulz's source text into something new. The central queries I articulate relate directly to the Quays' cinematic 'world' (that is, quite literally, small scale): its objects, set design, lighting, camera and editing and the sound track, how we perceive this 'world' and which models and theories of other creative practice can be used to describe it. Questions that also inform the writing included queries into the fine-arts base of animation, the contexts of puppet animation, and the film's devices that align it to artistic movements. I am not concerned with questions of genre and ideology, or those that attempt to place the film in a general continuum of animation practice.

To reveal how innovations in Street of Crocodiles that indirectly relate to the Quays' literary influences develop their poetics, Russian Formalist analysis is pertinent (as is, as we will see, James Joyce's linguistic anarchy). The Formalists were concerned with the individual's artistic expression and they aimed to develop a set of properties that, in their combination, explained the construction of poetic language. Formalism's main proponents were Viktor Shklovsky, Boris Eichenbaum, Roman

³⁷ Andrew, 1978, p. 45.

³⁸ Thompson, 1988, p. 43.

Jakobson, and their development of formalist approaches to works of art, mainly literature, have been adapted to other forms of creative practice. Shklovsky's concept of defamiliarisation was originally used for literature, yet it is useful in the present context:

The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects "unfamiliar", to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of the perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged.³⁹

These claims transmute into Sergei Eisenstein's writings on film form that become significant when I describe the Quays' unfamiliar and difficult cinematic objects and spaces. My specific focus on formal and aesthetic features of Street of Crocodiles include: literary interpretations; mise-en-scène relationships between parameters of set design, architecture and puppet design; camera, lenses and lighting, montage, and music, sound and noise. A 're-animation' of the dissected cinematic corpse of Street of Crocodiles attempts to explain what incites the spectator's active involvement in understanding the interplay between the film's visual, musical and other motifs and cues. I offer information sets that draw on experience and knowledge of other creative practice--including architecture, literature, music--that can be used for inferential procedures and applied to the Quay Brothers' films. As my analysis does not emphasise communication models and is less concerned with the films' ideological underpinnings, it has a greater focus on the poetics implicit in creation of the cinematic artwork and the way the viewer is actively involved in film reception. Most of the Quays' films offer very little narrative guidance, the viewer's experience is concentrated in the complex interactions of sound, montage, decors, sets and mise-en-scène saturated in the ornate collage style particular to the Quay Brothers' works, and accordingly ideological readings are less relevant for this book's aims.

Apprehension, Animism, Vitalism

I assume the spectator is actively involved in a variety of ways that contribute to his or her particular understanding of the film. Bordwell suggests "[c]omprehension is

³⁹ Shklovsky, in: Lemon and Reis, 1965, p. 11-12.

concerned with apparent, manifest, or direct meanings, while interpretation is concerned with revealing hidden, non-obvious meanings."⁴⁰ I would suggest that the hermeneutic engagement with the Quay Brothers' complex works triggers another, related reaction that precedes interpretation and contributes to understanding their films: apprehension.⁴¹ Apprehension is the cognitive condition of understanding, it means grasping something with the intellect, but it can also mean a grasping without affirmation of that intellection, and an anticipation that what may come may not be what is expected. Apprehended knowledge can be first-hand and sensory, as in the case of children, when they apprehend that a flame can burn and cause pain. It can also be knowledge that comes from others, for instance abstract concepts that conflict with our direct sensory--or phenomenal--apprehension. The Quays' films contain many unexpected visual and aural tropes and often use a montage dialectic of disorientation. Apprehension occurs at the moment that the viewer begins to accept the laws of their film's 'world', laws that exceed our own phenomenal experiences of reality, that cannot be explained by the material/mechanical origins of what we see, and this is the moment when interpretation can begin. Mark Bartlett suggests

apprehension means that comprehension can never be complete, that interpretation can never account for everything in a phenomenological experience. It is valorized in the fact that knowing in any sense is always incomplete, can be known only partially, which is another justification for microanalysis, and, a turn away from grand unified theories.⁴²

The concept of apprehension I am using, a grasping without affirmation of intellection, and an anticipation that what may come may not be what is expected, underpins my analysis of the Quay Brothers' films and of the spectator's experiences of defamiliarization and alienation and their psychological / emotional effects. Apprehension is also rooted in Freud's notion of the uncanny, and I will discuss this in Chapter 5.

The Quays often refer to metaphysics when discussing their works, and metaphysical is an often-used attribute in writings on the Quay Brothers' films and for the authors upon whom they draw. For my purposes, the term is too broad and I plan to use more specific concept and alternate terms. Metaphysics is a branch of philosophy that ranges from a general science of all things to a Kantian exposition of

⁴⁰ Bordwell, 1989, p. 2.

⁴¹ I am indebted to Mark Bartlett for this observation.

⁴² Email exchange with Mark Bartlett, 2007.

notions and truths, the knowledge of which is transcendental, independent of experience. As it does not have a singular meaning, I refer in most instances to related concepts that informs the apprehensive experience puppet animation can incite in viewers: animism and vitalism.

Writing on Institute Benjamenta, Laura Marks has described the Quays attitude to objects, one they share with Robert Walser, as animistic,⁴³ and I take this attribute further as a central concept to describing the distinctiveness of viewer experience of the Quay Brothers' works. As a type of metaphysics, I am interested in an animism that owes more to Platonism, than to the anthropological definition of animism related to religion (that was introduced by Edward B. Tylor in the 19th century⁴⁴). Plato's notion of the universal (that contrasts with the individual) is a metaphysical type, property or relation that modern Platonists do not claim exist, but that they 'are'. Victoria Nelson has described how Platonic and Gnostic beliefs that inanimate and vegetal matter had a soul were superseded by Aristotelian materialist world views and suggests there was a gnosis revival at the beginning of the nineteenth century in the form of the aesthetic movement of Romanticism that is pertinent for the authors I will discuss.⁴⁵ The technical cinematic properties of puppet animation allows these universals to be experienced on screen, as embodied forms of a type of existence that cannot otherwise be experienced by us.

A related philosophical notion that interrelates with animism in that it rejects purely materialist, mechanistic explanations of human behavior and actions, vitalism was initially a reaction against the currents of materialism and mechanistic determinism in the 18th and 19th centuries. It was later taken up by Wilhelm Friedrich Nietzsche in his "will to power", by Henri Bergson in his metaphysical vitalist text Creative Evolution (1911) and, relevant for spectatorship theory, Freud's theory of the unconscious. One of the proponents of early forms of vitalism was Arthur Schopenhauer, and his The World as Will and Representation takes cause with the conflict between the will, as a noumenal, or unconscious manifestation and representation, the phenomenal world. Theodor Plantinga summarises:

For Schopenhauer, the thing-in-itself is more than a mere unknown which we posit as a limit on our knowledge. We have an intuition of it in our willing acts, for it is itself will. The ultimate reality is the Will,

⁴³ Marks, 2002, p. 129.

⁴⁴ See Tylor, Edward B. Primitive Culture. 2 vols [1871], New York: Brentano's, 1924.

⁴⁵ Nelson, 2001, p. 61.

and the entire world of appearance must be regarded as its expression .

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This conflict is mirrored in our experience of the inanimate (material, mechanical, phenomenal) made animate (metaphysical, animistic, vitalistic) in the Quay Brothers animation of organic and inorganic matter, that are examples of Lindsays' 'mechanical, non-human' heroes: stick, rope, water, fire. In his metaphysics, Schopenhauer propounded the non-rational, universal will as the ultimate reality "the thing-as-such" (das Ding an sich) and the driving force behind all the manifestations of organic life as well as inorganic nature.⁴⁷ This is especially interesting in terms of puppet animation, since it can use organic and inorganic materials, in contrast to computer or 2D, which are renderings or artistic representations and not "the thing-as-such". Schopenhauer asserted that "the intellect is a mere superficial force, essentially and everywhere touching only the outer shell, never the inner core of things."⁴⁸ This description of the intellect's inability to comprehend the inner core of things deeply informs the notion of apprehension I am proposing, and Schopenhauer's concept of the will and its manifestations will figure in later chapters of this book.

Another term related to apprehension and the uncanny that centres on the viewer's experience of the Quay Brothers' films is enchantment, that I will revisit in the conclusion. In The Enchantment of Modern Life Jane Bennett's mission to rehabilitate the sense of enchantment in the modern world invokes ethics and aesthetics. In the introduction she outlines a phenomenology of enchantment. "Enchantment includes, then, a condition of exhilaration or acute sensory activity. To be simultaneously transfixed in wonder and transported by sense, to be both caught up and carried away--enchantment is marked by this odd combination of somatic effects."⁴⁹ Two of these effects are intellectual uncertainty and apprehension, and I will show how and why the Quays' engage our emotions, exhilarate us physically as we are barraged by the combination of exquisite haptic objects, elegant and choreographed gestures and a sound track that transports us into highly emotional realms. Bennett continues:

⁴⁶ Plantinga 1972, unpaginated.

⁴⁷ See Safranski, 1990, pp. 299-312.

⁴⁸ Schopenhauer, 1974 (1851), p. 301.

⁴⁹ Bennett, 2001, p. 5.

The mood I'm calling enchantment involves, in the first instance, a surprise encounter, a meeting with something that you did not expect and are not fully prepared to engage. Contained within this surprise state are (1) a pleasurable feeling of being charmed by the novel and as yet unprocessed encounter and (2) an more unheimlich (uncanny) feeling of being disrupted or torn out of one's default sensory-psychic-intellectual disposition. The overall effect of enchantment is a mood of fullness, plenitude, or liveliness, a sense of having had ones' nerves or circulation or concentration powers tuned up or recharged--a shot in the arm, a fleeting return to childlike excitement about life.⁵⁰

In the encounter with animistic imagery we are continually oscillating between this enchantment and an awareness of the material fact of these inanimate materials. Doubtless the initial pleasure a spectator feels is an aesthetic one. Collage style, carefully composed images, a wealth of shapes, textures, materials both anachronistic and postmodern are arranged in curious and elliptic narrative structures and underlaid with eerie music and soundscapes that can simultaneously alienate and charm. The feeling of enchantment is a phenomenological experience that contributes to the pleasure of watching the Quay Brothers' works.

This book, then, will inquire into such essential issues of puppet animation and cinematic experience. What is the ontological status of the animated object? What relations to our own lived, corporeal, tactile and haptic experience do the spaces and objects in these films have? A puppet film may be a representation of tangible objects and physical space, yet the animated spaces and objects will never be part of our daily experience. A slowly revolving screw rising out of its submerged existence in Street of Crocodiles is a complete machination by the artists: I can only experience this moment by watching the film. Of course, I can visit the Quays' atelier and hold the screw in my hand, bend over to look into the constructed set in which the scene is animated, and look through a viewfinder to regain a sense of proportion and framing that the film presents, but I will never be in the presence of that moving, animated object. These problems are aesthetic in nature, philosophical problems that arise in creation and appreciation of an imaginary unique to animation. Because many of the Quay Brothers' films offer unconventional narratives, they require a more culturally and fine art-informed active participation and schemata building from its audiences in order to understand the elliptical, referential and fragmented

⁵⁰ Ibid.

narrative it obliquely suggests. And because the polysemic, polyaesthetic visual references the films use are enriched by familiarity with them and their cultural and artistic contexts, there are considerable divergences in viewers' descriptions of the Quays' film. My approach to their works does not make claims to be 'correct' or unequivocal; it allows an individual and essentially idiosyncratic interpretation, valid insofar as it is supported by dominant formal devices and non-conventional elements that are explained and contextualised in relation to developing a poetics of their work to date.

The contributions I hope to make in this book to develop methodologies and approaches to the Quay Brothers' films originate in a deliberately eclectic use of cinema theories of spectatorship and film analysis with interdisciplinary excursions into art and architecture, linguistics, literature, narratology, phenomenology and critical theory that reflect the Quays' creative contexts. The aim here is to develop Carroll's call for small-scale questions through interdisciplinary approaches.⁵¹ Most of the approaches I use are not reliant on established, a priori or prescriptive theories of cinema. They are much more related to the experience of watching the Quay Brothers' films, if you like, through a phenomenological and experiential filter, an analytic pursuit of their poetics in quest of the pleasure of apprehension. I will attempt to explain the phenomena we experience from within: the experience of scale, for instance, or of how we understand the 'worlds' we see in their films and how they relate to our lived experience of reality, art and culture. I take my cue from Dermot Moran's reading of Jean-Paul Sartre's understanding of phenomenology as "allowing one to delineate carefully one's own affective, emotional, and imaginative life, not in a set of static objective studies such as one finds in psychology, but understood in the manner in which it is meaningfully lived".⁵² The cinema is a place into which many of us recurrently slip, to allow ourselves that most pleasurable experience of being moved, intellectually, affectively and emotionally, by what unfolds on screen. Watching an animated film always implies a different kind of spectatorial experience, and I am not expecting to solve the complex 'problem' that animation presents as a unique form of cinematic illusion. Rather, I will reflect upon why the Quays' films are meaningful and have enriched and informed my own 'inner world' and as they have, in different ways, for many others.

I am ultimately aiming for a praxis-centred poetics of the Quays' system of style. Yet am caught in a hermeneutic circle to some degree, in that I am undertaking

⁵¹ Carroll, in: Bordwell and Carroll, 1996, p. 58.

⁵² Moran, 2000, p. 5.

a synecdochal analysis, both relating parts of the Quays' artistic practice to their work as a whole, yet in order to do so I attempt to present how the particular 'world' of the Quay Brothers' films is constructed by exploring the uniqueness of the devices and defamiliarised functions of a specific film. I also hope to point out how the spectator's understanding of the Quays' contexts help to develop skills and refine schemata towards understanding how their films are constructed and what their artistic references are. Whether or not the points I make are valid for other kinds of puppet animation films is not my concern here; it may prove that some hypotheses can hold true for other films, but the approach is not attempting to produce these, although it may ultimately do so. It does not aim to posit the film or puppet animation as a whole within a wider cinematic context, nor does it want to locate such films in an ideology or attribute them with socio-critical functions. Street of Crocodiles stands out as a film that many considered as something completely new and innovative in animation film, yet are unable to aptly describe what the newness and innovation entails. My analysis is an attempt to clarify what this innovation constitutes and what sets the film apart from its contemporaries and its historical predecessors.

The eclectic iconography of the Quays' cinematic 'world', its meandering narrative structures and unique cosmogony hinders an easy or exclusive classification to a genre, or a movement. If anything their works belong to a hybrid category of poetic-experimental film that operates at a liminal threshold between live action and animation. My analysis wants to elucidate the heavy saturation of visual and aural reference to fine arts, literature, poetry, dance, architecture, graphics and sculpture, emphasises spectatorial engagement and describes the Quays' transformation of prose 'worlds' into the cinematic worlds. The results and conclusions of my work do not assume to offer comprehensive and pat solutions to the manifold complexities of all forms of puppet animation. The approaches and methods used in this study hope to sensitise awareness about the specificity and the very real differences in the experience of watching, perceiving and understanding the Quay Brothers' films, and to refine a language to describe the 'universe', 'world', 'realm' or 'region' they create. I hope this book will find readership among those who have left the cinema after seeing one of the Quays' films, those who wonder about their own unclarified attractions to the animated form and that certain ideas posited here may justify and confirm them and further, and that it encourages other filmgoers to reassess their concepts about animation.

Chapter 3. Authentic Trappers in Metaphysical Playrooms

Watching any film from the Brothers Quay means entering a complicity of furtive glances, choreographed shadows and a melange of motifs and tropes. Their opus exhibits an instantly recognisable and often emulated style, a shifting composite of chiaroscuro and assemblage of obscure objects and fragmented, skeletal narrative structures. Their works are closer to music than to dialogue, closer to poetry than to literature, closer to experimental interior monologue than to conventional fictional narrative. The first-time viewer of any of the Quay Brothers' films is often baffled by what seems to be the filmmakers' apparent unconcern for coherence in location, continuity, plot and narrative and may turn away from the film with an irritated shrug or puzzlement. Yet another is exhilarated by the break the films perform with many of the conventions governing most animation films. Or the viewer is enchanted, and his or her exegesis is a personal commitment to decipher and understand the elements of the film the Quays' embed in their multitude of styles. They have a distinct, complex aesthetic programme; whether documentaries on optics, animation shorts or the black-and-white feature Institute Benjamenta (1995), their imagery obeys—and sometimes intentionally transgresses—the laws particular to their idiosyncratic cinematic universe. Together they create a synaesthetic, haptic 'world', a palimpsest of evocative sound and images that meld music, literature, dance and architecture, graphic design, the sacred and the occult, pathology and eroticism into often puzzling cinematic enigmas. The films are music-driven, the images redolent with allusion and references; usurped materials and objects take on an uncanny echo of their past uses. Unencumbered by linear narrative, guided by a musical trajectory, viewers can immerse themselves in various levels of puzzlement or enchantment.

'Metaphysical Playroom' is an intertitle from The Cabinet of Jan Svankmajer (1984). The twins describe a scene in the film, where a 'young' puppet is initiated into the secrets of the 'older' character he visits.

We created an Archimboldo-esque portrait of Svankmajer as a librarian/ alchemist along with a young child assistant (clearly the two of us, only not two-headed) set in a décor that was simultaneously the 16th

and 20th century Prague of now. The film was an open homage to a 'maestro'.¹

The 'mentor' takes the youth through a series of exercises where inanimate objects perform feats that skirt natural laws of physics. Balls bounce backwards from in reverse entropy inertia to high trajectories, travel up stairs instead of down, mysterious Babuschka-like drawers-in-drawers lining a wall open themselves of their own accord. It is easy to read this film as autobiographical, especially when the twins acknowledge their indebtedness to Svankmajer's artistic and cinematic expertise. Yet Svankmajer is but one of an array of artist and filmmakers who the Quays acknowledge as influences, and this film was not their first set of experiments. Inspired by impressions, words and music, they transmute them into the images they create in their studio, itself the embodiment of a metaphysical playroom, brimming with the trappings and paraphernalia of the tools of their trade. More often than not metaphysical concepts undergo a dual transformation: the first is when they are reified and given a physical form, and the second when these forms are animated, and become animistic.

Stephen and Timothy Quay have experimented continually in their own metaphysical playroom. Play is a form of experiment, and experimenting also means learning from the unexpected. Occasional formal irregularities have never irritated them--on the contrary, in the process of shooting they let themselves be inspired by 'mistakes' and go on to develop these into exactly what makes their films unique. A lingering shot of an object or a movement that at first appears inconsequential or even banal is gradually transformed into a scene's central motif. The Quays: "We don't ever set off with sublime, pristine conceptions. . . . We embrace both disaster and chance with the ambivalence of open arms. These accidents bend the work, and we've followed in their footsteps like authentic trappers."² This chapter tracks the Quays' historical progression through geographic and creative worlds and their transition from art students to animation filmmakers. It explains production contexts, inspirational pathways and other information on the films' developmental processes. We will see that some of their best images and sequences are the result of trying to do one thing, and another happens. Or when they look at the rushes, they see something they hadn't planned that they develop and perfect, such as the animation of sunlight that garnered critical acclaim and awards for Institute Benjamenta and In

¹ Interview with Chris Robinson, June 2001.

² McLatchy, 1989, p. 93.

Absentia (2000). The 'Metaphysical Playroom' is the locus from which the Quays' cinematic 'worlds' originate, an unmistakable signature that continues to develop after more than three decades of film making.

'Twinema'

There is a phenomenon that seems to dog the Quays: the tendency of critics and fans to speculate about the two of them as much as to review their films. Thyrza Nichols Goodeve's introduction to her 1996 interview with the Quays provides a sense of the mystery that enshrouds them:

I half expected to find them a pair of wizened gnomes with rusty screws, butterfly dust, and cobwebs dangling from their hair. Nothing so exorbitant--only two disarmingly friendly, whirling persona of elegantly rumpled charisma, who just happened to have turned their accidental birthright as identical twins . . . into one of art's most ingenious and visionary collaborations.³

Goodeve's opinion of the ingenuity of their works is shared by many, and it is natural that critics are curious about the originators of this 'visionary collaboration'. This is fuelled by the Quays' encompassing knowledge of the arts and literature, their sartorial style and the spoken and musical eloquence that transmute into their films. According to Griffiths, during the time at the RCA and after they were very stylish, and he has photographs of them doing model shoots in white suits: "It was a very fashionable period. It was of course both an erotic and an attractive moment as a student. They didn't make money out of it--a student photographer persuaded them to pose."⁴ There is something Dorian Gray-ish persistent in their appearance over the years when one looks at the photographs that have appeared in publications. No doubt their 'appearance' as Ipson and Pullat Fallari (albeit in a set of still photographs) in one of the biographical vignettes in Peter Greenaway's enigmatic, metafictional The Falls (1980, made just after their first funded film) also had an effect, and anecdotes have it that they were part of the inspiration for A Zed and Two Noughts (1985). It is understandable that the Quays are reticent about these photographs--they document a private moment that has little bearing on their

³ Nichols Goodeve, 1996, p. 83.

⁴ Griffiths interview, 2003. Unless indicated otherwise, all quotations of Griffiths without references in this book are from two interviews with Griffiths in August and November 2002 and one in 2003.

filmmaking. They playfully incited more conjecture with reworked images of themselves as choirboys, one the few photographs of themselves in circulation--stylised as much as their images or in surroundings that give hints about their working methods. These images gently and playfully tease the fascination they hold for people as twins, but these are often collaged or altered in a way that reveals their subtle sense of self-irony. An earlier preference for the shades, textures and various states of disrepair notorious in vintage clothing made them look as if they could be in one of their films. They are nonetheless pragmatic about the interest they incite:

We're totally ignorant and / or naïve about split personalities, inward turning natures of our relationship, or wishing to work independently of each other. These are not, and have never been, issues in the remotest sense, and it shows how fantasy bound others are about twins.⁵

There is something oddly uncomfortable about some of the earlier reviews--as if the frustration of not being able to 'unlock' the secret of what makes the twins tick shimmers through the writing. Critics expound upon them in adoration, or--in texts from less discrete critics who want their pound of flesh-- a nasty criticism of the twins themselves.⁶ These texts read as though written by frustrated snobs who did not get past the Quays' 'private doorman'. The Internet is also a platform where Quay fans, often quite innocently, post information about them that the Quays state is simply not true.

All that about us being 'reclusive' was spun from a website. Everyone buys into the waffle verbatim and then traffics it for [himself or herself]. There's nothing wrong with being aggressively modest and we won't suffer idiots or gossip, least of all without imagination.⁷

Critics' propensity to link their personal appearance with that of their films has lessened, most notably since their arrival in the 'serious' field of live-action feature filmmaking. However, curiosity about them persists, possibly because earlier questions did not provide satisfying answers, for the critics at least, who are enquiring for their readers as well. One of the Quays recent responses: "Of course our upbringing and environment are crucial, but [one] must also realise that being

⁵ McLatchy, 1989, p. 94.

⁶ For example, a review from Maureen Callahan in the New York Magazine, 1996.

⁷ Quay correspondence with Chris Robinson, 2001.

identical twins allowed us a much greater suspension or desertion of the real world."⁸ In this remark lies their interest in a particular genre of literature that informs the origins of the stylised, hermetic realms and spaces of their films and the cinematic 'worlds' that they conjure.

Norristown to London Town

The Quays were born in Norristown, Philadelphia in 1947. They enjoyed a relatively domestic upbringing, went to art school, and then, like many graduates in the 60s, ventured abroad. Far more interesting is the Quays' own account of themselves: In a letter to J.D. McClatchy published in a 1989 profile, they tongue-in-cheeked a dream list for critics and fans worth citing at length.

What if we said we [were] born of a heavily tainted family, neurasthenic, encephalitic, each one with an atrophied testicle, a sly liking for geese, chicken, etc., pigtails in pillowcases, suffer from dry tongues, overly predisposed towards music and abandoned organ lofts, blah, blah, blah.⁹

They then go on to counterpoint this with a bio that reads like any for someone growing up in 50s America:

No, we grew up sweating with obedience. Our Father was a 2nd class machinist for Philadelphia Electric, our Mother an impeccable housewife (who was a figure skater before marriage). On our father's side there were two grandfathers: one a tailor from Berlin who had a shop in South Philly and the other, who was apparently a cabinetmaker and we were told that the 5th floor of Lit Brothers [department store] in Philly has cabinets by the Quays. (Now we lived in Philly for some five years and never made that tiny little expedition to confirm it). Our Mother's father was excellent at carpentry and was also a chauffeur when Philly only had 5 automobiles to its name. So! In terms of puppetry it's surprisingly all there--carpentry, mechanisms and tailoring and figure skating to music to score any of our aberrant tracking shots.¹⁰

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ McLatchy, 1989, p. 94.

¹⁰ Ibid.

However, this did and does not stop ruminations on the origins of their intensely private universe. It simply makes them more exotic if one considers how far they have come from the sentimentalised middle-class clichés of America. It is of greater consequence to know that Philadelphia is a culturally heterogeneous mix inhabited by Italian, Greek, Ukrainian, Polish and Irish immigrants and had a large Jewish expatriate population. This gives clues about an early infiltration of Eastern European culture in the Quays' own past, tangibly evident in box-littered sidewalks where one could easily imagine two boys rummaging, or in the shops to where German watchmakers, kosher butchers or Italian dressmakers transposed their private shadows and mythologies of distant Europe. The twins' later migration (like that of many of the authors they admire) to a metropolis mid-point between modern America and shrouded Eastern European culture is a continuation of an artists' tradition in which identity becomes a cloak of conscious choices.

The moving image was not the initial interest that brought the twins to the Philadelphia College of Art (PCA) in 1965. Their artistic training and development was coloured by excursions into the worlds of art that were tangentially related with illustration. It was at the PCA that the Quays had their first turning point in terms of their gradual move eastwards. Exposure to an exhibition of Polish film, theatre and opera posters from the 1950s and 1960s lubricated the visual machinery of their imaginations: "It utterly ravished us, particularly the power of the one, single image bristling with a painterly, almost ecstatic use of typography."¹¹ The unique graphic designs fuelled their interest in all things Eastern European, from apothecary bottles and Jan Lenica's graphic animated shorts to the moody, austere alleyways and magical, dusty shop windows of Polish cities and sylvan villages. Like many artists working with the static graphic image or sculpture, their interest in film was keen. At the PCA, they also took advantage of the chance to try out other fields and they began making films, experimenting with cinematic movement and narrative. They became aware of the possibilities of cinema, partly through screenings: films from Luis Buñuel, Andreij Tarkovsky, Sergei Paradjanov and early works from Carl Theodor Dreyer had a profound influence on them. The possibilities of cinema opened up to the twins, albeit somewhat sobering: "We did some live action--trivial. I [Stephen] was in the film department in final year. We worked on things together a few times, but it really was the animation that most intrigued us."¹² After a few live-

¹¹ Ibid., p. 93.

¹² Quay Brothers interview, 1992.

action short films they ventured into experimenting with animation, as have many artists whose creative output is graphic or sculptural:

Well, I think at the beginning it was frustration with the frozen image, and not amplifying it by sound and rhythm and music and sequential time. I think that having done the first few films we realised you have that, and also our great love for music, and you realise that that dimension would always be missing until we could do animation.¹³

After graduating in illustration at the PCA in 1969, their kindled interest in Europe was not the only reason they wanted to go abroad--it was also a way to avoid the Vietnam War conscription, which they averted by successfully convincing the authorities not to draft them. They tried a number of ruses, and in the end they escaped, like so many artists at the time, by suggesting, among other things, that they were homosexual. Free of the draft, the twins set off for Europe, anticipating the worlds and forgotten corners that the films, posters and books hinted at.

Exile and emigration takes on many forms and expressions: Prague-born Franz Kafka wrote in German, Robert Walser's life took him to Berlin, Paris and Berne and eventually to the Waldau and Herisau sanatoriums in Switzerland, and it is fair to say that many artists live a self-imposed inner exile. In 1969 the Quays moved to London and enrolled in the Royal College of Art, a move that brought them closer to the literary and musical regions of Eastern Europe. The first encounters with East European art and art house film at the PCA provided unfailing inspirational sources for the Quays' future films, most of which have been shot and produced in London and its environs. And everywhere was music, music and more music: Gustav Mahler, French and Italian chansons, Jean Sibelius, Anton Berg and Leos Janacek, who was later to become the subject of an artist's documentary for the BFI. For the brothers, these and other artists created "a poetry of shadowy encounters and almost conspiratorial secretness."¹⁴ They had hoped to enter the RCA's (now defunct) filmmaking programme, which as not possible, so they continued their illustration training. This didn't keep them from pursuing their interest in the moving image. They got access to filmmaking equipment during their MA studies there and made further excursions into filmmaking.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ McLatchy, 1989, p. 93.

We'd always felt a strong pull towards cinema--both live-action and animation and because of our graphic formation it became quite a natural step to head towards animation. As we'd done a lot of collage work, our earliest animation efforts were in this form: already there was texture, light and shade and the school had a fantastic photocopy machine which had the most beautiful range of blacks and whites and greys. Puppets came much later--when we were 31 and this came about more as a wild dare.¹⁵

This early interest in monochrome ranges remains pervasive throughout much of the Quay Brothers' filmmaking. Der Loop der Loop, Duetto (both 1972) and Palace en Flammes (1974) that was their graduation film were all animation films made during their studies (my requests to screen these early films were politely fended off).

Dissatisfied with these early experiments, the Quays considered the films 'lost' quite early in their career. Le Fanu's 1984 article about their work as independent filmmakers and the early collaborations with Griffiths includes comments on these films. Perhaps because this was at a point in time when the Quays had not yet distanced themselves from the early films, Le Fanu was able to see two of them. He rather flatly describes an image that portends the recurring inclusion of two main protagonists in some of their early films: "Der Loop Der Loop has a couple of acrobats tossing each other backwards and forwards under the big top, until the disintegration of limbs on one causes the proceedings to halt abruptly."¹⁶ Griffiths describes the cut-out film Der Loop der Loop as being heavily influenced by Valerian Borowczyk: "It was very graphic, very flat, and they used the same music as Valerian Borowczyk did for Goto--L'île d'Amour--Handel's Organ Concerto." Contrary to what is often written about their influences, Borowczyk was the animator who made the greatest impression on the Quays early on. His starkly graphic cutout and puppet animation films impressed the twins so deeply that as students, they organised film screenings of his works, and their RCA final thesis was on his Goto--L'île d'Amour. Griffiths considers Palais en Flammes as "their Buñuel film. Insects, in bottles, being stop framed, tennis rackets hanging over wires and things like that with Wagner, so that's really their L'Age D'Or [Luis Buñuel, 1930]." Insects are a recurring motif in the Quay Brothers' later films (one I will return to), as are the Dalí-esque limp tennis rackets. Il Duetto was another cutout film--the Quays had seen films by Lenica,

¹⁵ Interview with Chris Robinson, June 2001.

¹⁶ Le Fanu, 1984, p. 135.

whose work had a profound influence on their first animations, and Lenica, in turn, had made films with Borowczyk. Le Fanu:

In Il Duetto, slighter and more sinuous of line, a cellist and a lady opera singer slug out a trial by combat to the modernist music of Xenakis. Both films--pugnacious, clever, a touch sinister--share the economy and elegance that is the wit of the born cartoonist.¹⁷

There are differing opinions about the quality (and whereabouts) of these films. It is the Quays' prerogative to decide which of their works are seen, and like many filmmakers, they are dissatisfied with these early ventures into animation. Yet there are others (including this author) who would like to see the films in order to better contextualise the later ones and to get a sense of how they began animating while they were studying illustration. Griffiths wrote a fictional essay about the lost films that fuelled more curiosity about these early experiments at a point in time when the twins were looking to move on.

As regular interlopers in the RCA's film department, it was possible for the Quays to make the films in part because animation could be shot relatively independent of the College's facilities, not drawing on the film department's resources that were prioritised for those enrolled in the programme. The films were made with help from other students and in the collaborative environment at art colleges, the Quays also got involved in other students' projects. They are listed in the credits for fellow student Lys Flowerdays's Bal Masque (1981), made after they graduated. After graduating from the RCA in 1972, the Quays looked for work in London. The situation for young graduates was very difficult as funding for filmmaking was scarce. Unable to find work and as their student visas expired, they returned to the USA, to Philadelphia. This was to be an extended gulag away from where they truly wanted to be. They spent five years working at different jobs familiar to artists who need money to live and to be able to continue working on their art: they waited on tables, drove taxis, washed dishes, and lived sometimes on social security benefits. Perhaps their profound appreciation of fine wine as ruby and golden 'liquid inspiration' was nurtured in the protracted, wine-imbibing halcyon periods of pre-and post opening hours around the culinary hell of restaurant chaos. All the while they were devouring books, music and film, applying for commissions and doing illustrations for publications as diverse as *Playboy* and scientific journals.

¹⁷ Ibid.

Illustration, which was the Quays' original training, provided little satisfying work on the whole. Instead of the great European authors, their particular style attracted book cover assignments for 'lowly' science fiction. This is an indication of North American misunderstanding of the European German and English Romantic, gothic, grotesque and fantastic authors--Samuel Coleridge Mary Shelly, Jules Verne, Hoffmann, Kafka, Schulz--as singly a source of horror, magic and utopian visions, disregarding the metaphysical and its place in European and other cultural histories. Victoria Nelson describes this as "garish store displays on this same American boulevard of trash", a realm she calls the "sub-Zeitgeist".¹⁸ She provides an illuminating account of the diverse development of fantastic literature in Europe and North America that she dubs the ghettoisation of the American fantastic, noting that: "[e]ven though [America] had a rich supernatural--even apocalyptic--tradition in its popular religion, however, other cultural influences would severely limit the presence of the transcendental in the mainstream intellectual culture."¹⁹ The Quays' strong affinities to these rich traditions of European fantastic literature not yet integrated into an intellectual creative community was certainly a factor in their turning away from the USA and towards a Europe more receptive to works inspired by these authors.

In 1977, an unexpected grant from the National Endowment Fund for the Arts made a sojourn to England, Wales and Scotland possible. They had included some of their illustrations and the grant was to allow them to discover Celtic designs and contexts. After the funding ran out, they moved around Europe as best they could, eventually ending up in Holland, where they designed book covers for the Dutch publisher Meullenhof, for whom they have done a total of six Louis-Ferdinand Céline covers. They continued to comb libraries, book dealers and junk shops, surrounded by an architectural and cultural wealth and history of the places they visited that is sometimes referenced in their films. In 1979, the twins returned to London on one of their trips and met up with some of their old classmates from the RCA. One of these was Keith Griffiths, who had kept in touch after graduation; they sent each other postcards and news about what each of them was doing. Griffiths had a continuing interest in animation film that had been sparked during the RCA film screenings during film critic and educator Ray Durnat's lectures, whom both the Quays and Griffiths praise as a phenomenal tutor (the Quays discovered his writings on Buñuel, Bresson and Franju while at the PCA). Griffiths: "I made some

¹⁸ Nelson, 2001, p. 97.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 77

animation, [the Quays] were making some animation, but I regard all of this as largely accidental. You carry that forward but in different ways." Important for this meeting with the Quays was the fact that Griffiths was working in Production at the BFI at the time.

Keith Griffiths, Conspirateur Extraordinaire

Filmmakers need producers that sustain and support their visions of cinema and who do not 'water down' the original ideas. Since encouraging them to submit their first proposal to the BFI, Keith Griffiths has produced or co-produced all of the Quay Brothers' films except most commercials. Besides his engagement in film producing, Griffiths wears many professional 'hats' and is an untiring lobbyist for art house film. He is an author, curator, researcher and critic, is a welcome lecturer at higher education institutions, and is often invited as a jury member. Griffiths has directed films on Michael Snow, Robert Breer, Jean Luc Godard, Jon Jost, Hans-Jürgen Syberberg, Jan Svankmajer and Raul Ruiz. His extended coterie of auteur filmmakers and artists is impressive: Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen, Chris Petit, Iain Sinclair, Patrick Keiller and Steve McQueen have all worked closely with him. Art house and auteur cinema has always been difficult to finance, and recent developments in UK funding schemes and co-production financing have led to dwindling project support for his and other production houses. In recent years this has become even more precarious. The TV and media production company Illuminations, which supports Griffiths and is one of the significant production companies for this kind of filmmaking, almost closed down their art house productions in 2001. But new co-productions have enabled the company to continue supporting Griffiths' stable of visionary filmmakers.

Griffiths also produced and often directed an array of animation filmmaker documentaries: The Five and Dime Animator (1985), on Robert Breer; Doodlin'-- Impressions of Len Lye (1987); Oskar Fischinger (1992); Abstract Cinema (1993), a 52-minute interview-based documentary on abstract film, and The Insect Affair; Starewicz Cinemagician (1994). Griffiths doesn't consider himself an animation producer, as he doesn't separate animation from other filmmaking. He has some thoughts on a type of cinema that the Quays' hybrid form fits into that intersects with Zielinski's concept of 'cinema activism':

I'm just interested in certain kinds of filmmaking in which animation or certain animation that fits that particular area of my psyche. That can veer from the excitement of what I call the abstract image or the sort of surrealistic flow of images . . . That is why I am interested in [Len] Lye and [Robert] Breer. I am also interested in, if you like, optical metamorphosis, which is the other reason why Breer and Lye fit into that, but so do people like [Charles] Bokonowski, who you might not consider an animator, but who I consider an optical manipulator of images. So out of that connects my interest with Svankmajer, the twins [the Quays], people like [Juri] Norstein, [Piotr] Dumala, [Priit] Pärn, or Caroline Leaf, where metamorphosis is a major part of the image process. I never considered myself to be interested in animation per se. It is a continuation of work, and that work is a continuation of work in abstraction, in metamorphosis and relationship of images and meaning. That is where the so-called surrealist interest connects.²⁰

Griffiths' attraction to this kind of filmmaking has been instrumental in the Quays' development. Early on he recognised originations of their unique talent in illustration and abilities to transfer this imagery into the moving image. His professional trajectory, not exclusively aligned with that of the Quays, gives insights into how their collaborations developed and why this working relationship of over 25 years has persisted.

In 1976, the BFI was reshuffling its production department. Griffiths: "They appointed this 'maniac'--I say this in inverted commas and with complete pleasure--who was working at the BBC, clearly heavily involved with left thinking and things--Peter Sainsbury." Sainsbury had the political clout and expertise to be able to get the films made that he envisioned, but he lacked knowledge of the technical parameters of filmmaking, and Sainsbury suggested Griffiths apply for the post of Deputy Head of Production. Griffiths: "He wanted a deputy sympathetic to the films he wanted to do but also knew the logistics and, because he wanted to start to make bigger films, someone who could keep an eye on all that." Griffiths had--by luck, coincidence, and ability--become a producer, but one with an intimate knowledge of the filmmaking process. Griffiths got the job and was to become deeply involved in one of the most exciting periods at the BFI. This was the time when some of the key discourses around film theory, politics and aesthetics were embroiled and the influential film

²⁰ Griffiths Interview 1996.

journal Screen was in full steam.²¹ Between 1976-80, Griffiths had departmental administrative responsibility and was Production Co-ordinator of British Film Institute Productions. He produced five feature-length fiction films and numerous short films for the BFI and co-producers.

All of Sainsbury's projects had to be approved by a production board not particularly sympathetic to his politically charged ideas. Griffiths was involved with all of these, and recalls two of the most meaningful successes:

There were the most horrendous rows. Two things happened. [Sainsbury] pushed through Chris Petit's Radio On with Wim Wenders, which I went on to produce, which, according to Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, radically broke the whole thing apart about low-budget independent art cinema in this country and portraying Britain at that time. There was a very good film editor who made rather eccentric films, but all we had was a presentation of drawings. His name was Peter Greenaway. We had almost a stand-up row with the board, and in the end it got so heated that they said--'well, do what you bloody well like but this man will never, ever, ever be a filmmaker'. That was A Walk Through H [1978].

Greenaway had been making small films with his own money at the Office of Information. Griffiths managed to get bits of film stock and used small signature slush funds to get a hundred feet of Greenaway's film processed now and again. Now that he was in a position to fund projects, Griffiths suggested the Quays submit a proposal for a short and they put together what he called a 'scrappy treatment with great Quay drawings on it.' The BFI received hundreds of scripts and tried to reach agreement with Sainsbury on what could be presented to the board and funded, and at one meeting the Quays' project was one of the shortlisted films. Griffiths gives a flavour of how funding was allocated:

There wasn't any real discussion about it at all. I just put the treatment forward. We might have beefed up the application form in some way. There was a young film critic, probably the same age as us, called Tony Raynes, who was sitting on the board--we had been attempting to change the constituency of the board to get in some people who supported us. The meeting took place, the money was carved up, you

²¹ Screen was initially established as Screen Education in 1969 and remains an influential Film Studies journal that emerged concurrently with the film cooperative movements.

know, these arguments. 'OK, Bill Douglas, £25,000, so and so, Greenaway, £10,000'. We added it all up--and there was around £7'000 left. But none of the other projects could possibly do anything with that sum. So Tony Raynes said 'Well, the Quay Brothers could make a film' and we got it!

Raynes' support for the project led to the first funded short the Quay Brothers made together with Griffiths. He realised that it was different than anything the BFI had done before, although they had funded a small number of animation films in the past. The Quays: "The British Film Institute said they would give us money for something experimental. We said, we've never done puppets, so why not--it was the most experimental thing we could think of."²² This first project marks the beginning of the collaboration with Griffiths.

Koninck Studios

Koninck Studios was founded in 1979 by the Quays together with Griffiths as producer. The company name originates from a Belgian beer label; the symmetry of the letters and its graphic design appealed to Griffiths and the Quays, who embellished the typography with their own inimitable graphic style. Again, it was part circumstance, part coincidence. The three of them were in a bar in Brussels, collected the beer mats of what they had drunk, wrote down the names and send them to the Company Registration office: "the only one they would permit was Koninck. That's why it's Koninck, there was no other reason. It was actually De Koninck." The Quays set up a small working space in their South Kensington flat and proceeded to make their first post-RCA independent film. The prize-winning Nocturna Artificialia--Those Who Desire Without End (1979) was, in Griffiths' words, "fantastic . . . a luxury public subsidy film." They listed themselves as 'Gebrüder Quaij' in the credits (which are in French), perhaps an indication of the artists' play with identity, perhaps a gesture to the German Expressionist influences the film suggests.

Nocturna Artificialia wavers at the threshold between consciousness and sleep. The poetic gesture initiated here displays traces of their interest in dream, labyrinthine narrative and hermetic 'worlds' that is revisited in their later films. The film introduces a number of motifs and formal principles that continue throughout

²² Nichols Goodeve, 1996, p. 85.

the Quay Brothers' later works: puppets enmeshed in disorienting point-of-view structures; hermetic interiors; elaborate, sometimes animated graphics; complex orchestrations of light and shadow; invocations of Eastern European imagery and cultural artefacts, and sound tracks that both counterpoint and sustain the imagery. The use of natural objects sequestered from their origin (for instance, a dried, heavily thorned rose stalk is integrated into one of the set constructions) and off-screen space is insinuated by a marvellous sound and music track. As in the majority of their short films, the narrative in Nocturna Artificialia is unspectacular, at times non-existent: a solitary figure gazes out of a window, enters the nocturnal street, is transfixed by a passing tram, and, suddenly, back in his room, falls from his chair and wakes up. The film is about a love affair with a tram in the strange hours of the night, structured in eight sections. These are separated by the only language in the film, by intertitles that hark back to silent film conventions, in English, Polish, French and German, inserted between the main figure's somnambular wanderings. In shifting states of epiphany and hallucination, the figure's trajectory is constructed by the formal treatment of the images (camera angles, spatial organisation, focus plane shifts and dissolves), and by the music and sound track that synthesise the characteristically disturbing tension. The film is also saturated with a Kafkaesque transfixedness with the life of objects. There are scenes reminiscent of Borowczyk's Les Jeux des Anges (1964) both in the surreal, uncannily long lingering of the camera on bizarre objects and spaces and in the use of organ music.

The twins had not yet developed confidence in animating puppets. This may explain why sets and decors dominate in the film, and that the puppet seems to be secondary. Commenting on their early explorations in puppet animation, the Quays remarked:

We realised that with puppets and objects an entire universe and, above all, an exploration of space could be created at the level of the tabletop. This provided us with an intimate theatre, a tight collaboration between the two of us, a learning of all the metiers and exploration of all their potentials.²³

In Nocturna Artificialia this exploration of space and techniques is rampant. The title hints at what they intended to do--conjure a dream world in which artificial, carefully designed lighting creates a night world, where the light introduced the

²³ Quay correspondence with Chris Robinson, 2001.

oneiric fantasies of objects, spaces and movement. Perhaps influenced by the black and white films they had seen (Bresson, Dreyer, Franju) they started to do unusual things with lighting, unusual in that the objects appear out of darkness in the tenebrous mood prevails in the film.

We could not bear to just have the light on [the objects], we wanted the light to give them flux. In most [puppet] animation the light is just there. [Filmmakers] just blast it, light every corner of the set. We tend to be selective. Nocturna Artificialia was night lighting, all of it. It was entirely about the night, what came into the light and disappeared into the dark. The backgrounds were dark--it was 'black' out there--we didn't have black [diegetic] walls. The walls outside the set were black, so there was nothing out there, it was just black.²⁴

In the dark, and the black of night in this film, sound and music effects are co-conspirators with the visuals. Another reason why the first project is so important is that it marked their first collaboration with sound track designer Larry Sider, a colleague from the BFI, introduced to them by Peter Wollen, who has since contributed to most of their films. Sider's sensitivity to cinema's aural properties and his collaborative nature in developing unique soundscape counterparts are defining features of many a Quay film. He has continually refined his skills as an editor and sound designer, lectures on sound at institutions around the world and is head of the London-based School of Sound, and he created the sound design for The Piano Tuner of Earthquakes, (2005) Quays' second feature.

At the time, the BBC would not have considered broadcasting such a film, so its first screenings took place in cinemas. The BFI's regional film theatre distribution department, then headed by Marxist critic Colin MacArthur, was very left-oriented and proactive. It included Nocturna Artificialia in the programme packages suggested for cinemas. A BFI promotional flyer for the film already sets the tone for many articles written on the Quays' later work, relating key imagery, techniques and inspirations of the first film that are revisited in later films:

In one possible reading of [Nocturna Artificialia's] schematic narrative, the dreamer (a cataleptic figure recalling the Surrealists' fascination with dolls) is seduced by the mystery of the city at night, leaves his room and

²⁴ Quay Brothers interview, 2003.

goes into the street, where a tram-car (which might be named 'desire') carries him towards an obscure epiphany; after which he returns to / awakens in the room. The movement of the film, involving rapid, almost imperceptible dissolves within otherwise static tableaux, recalls the sadistic enigmas of Borowczyk's Jeux des Anges (which also opens and closes with a train journey; while the specific iconography evokes Paul Delvaux's nocturnal streets and trams (cf. The Porte rouge tramway, Ephesus), eerily traversing what Breton called 'the great suburbs of the heart'.²⁵

The unnamed critic on the flyer was Ian Christie, currently Anniversary Professor of Film and Media History at Birkbeck, University of London. The text was an excerpt from his enthusiastic review that appeared in the November 1979 Monthly Film Bulletin and set off a spate of criticism on the Quay Brothers' early work in short film (that includes authors Le Fanu, Greenaway, Durgnat, Terence Rafferty, Chris Petit and Roger Cardinal). Considering the critics' enthusiastic response, it was a dramatic and unparalleled entrance into the arena of animation film. Almost a quarter century after it was made, the Quays have a different regard for the film: "Nocturna Artificialia simply doesn't bear any discussion at all. We've suppressed it mentally and are sorry now that we couldn't have trashed the neg. It's worse than any of our student films."²⁶ They regard this film as unsuccessful, and more as a learning experience--that enabled them to work with puppets--but this proved to be more difficult than they had imagined. They had never had formal training in animation, and they learned mostly by watching others do it and by making their self-proclaimed 'mistakes' that they developed into some of the most remarkable aesthetic features of their films. Most likely their own hardest critics, the film nonetheless continues to be programmed at festivals and art house cinemas. It was, indeed, the film that opened up the world of public-funded films.

The landscape of funding institutions was still relatively uncharted territory for the young filmmakers, so Griffiths again provided the financial impetus for the next film project. Since he knew that asking the BFI for more funding would be futile, he considered other possibilities. He suggested his former employer, the Greater London Arts Association, and helped the Quays put together an application. They were granted around £3,000 to make a short based on Franz Kafka's A Fratricide, for

²⁵ Promotional flyer for the film, BFI, undated, author uncredited.

²⁶ Correspondence, July 2003.

which they decided to retain the original title Ein Brudermord. Franz Kafka's diaries had also been instrumental to kindling the Quays' interest in Eastern Europe, and this early film interprets the dream form style Kafka employed for many of his texts. They acquired a Mitchell camera (still in their current studio), and shot the film that was completed in 1980. It reworks some of the imagery used in the RCA films Il Duetto and Palais en Flammes. Elliptical, tense and disorienting in its disparate and disconnected set constructions, the film tells the story of a murder. Mark Le Fanu describes the two protagonists, Schmar and Wese, as "scorpion-like puppets in a whirling five-minute battle--obvious comparison with Buñuel: the same entomological calmness and dispassionate scientific observation".²⁷ Griffiths, who has many prints of their illustration work, suggests the style goes back to illustrations for Scientific Magazine and for New Statesman Philadelphia, recalls that one of their graphics tutors at the PCA in graphics may have been a scientific illustrator, and that this may explain the film's visual precision.

It was to prove an experience that turned artistic success into bureaucratic failure. Like so many young filmmakers, the Quays and Griffiths were not yet versed in the intricacies and variations of national and international copyright law. While preparing to distribute Ein Brudermord, they received a letter from the Kafka Estate's literary lawyers in the USA. Koninck was forbidden to show the film, stating they would be sued for breach of copyright. The film was based on the American translation still protected under American copyright, which didn't count the years of war in its calculations. It was a small film made on a small budget, that they had intended to send to festivals, and suddenly they were confronted with an apparatus of legal threats. Besides the Kafka disaster, the sound track incorporated music from Krzysztof Penderecki, for which they had not cleared rights. As a result, the film cannot be screened publicly. The experience has not lost its edge and was a slight bone of contention between Griffiths and the Quays: in a 2001 interview, they gave him the responsibility for not having cleared the rights.²⁸ Griffiths relativises their response retrospectively, recalling the situation as it was more than 20 years ago: "They should remember the pain and the struggle and the innocence that one goes through in making these early films." But collaborations between filmmakers and producers are occasionally marred by such mistakes, and it was one they all learned from for planning future projects, many of them based on literary works.

²⁷ Le Fanu, 1984, p. 136.

²⁸ Aita, 2001.

At this point Griffiths had decided to move on from the BFI. Having made his mark in public funding and production, he was keen to try something new. A friend of his from the RCA asked him to work at James Garrett, the largest British advertising company at the time who had made the first television advertisement. Griffiths: "I went to work as a commercial producer, to get some experience beyond public subsidy low-budget moviemaking. I wanted to spend some money and see people with Mitchells, Technicolor, Panavision, things like that." In the company of British filmmakers the likes of Nicholas Roeg, Richard Lester and others, Griffiths learned the intricacies of commercial production and policies. It was also the first time he earned substantial amounts of money, which was to prove instrumental in the Quays' future development. He contacted the Quays to tell them he was able to subsidise Koninck Studios for two to three years, a time when he himself was learning how to run a business.

Griffiths continued to look for funding and was aware of a scheme of the Arts Council of Great Britain that considered proposals for films about artists and culture. He suggested making a documentary that integrated animation as a radical new way of presenting aspects of the subject. They decided on a contemporary take on Punch and Judy and, according to Griffiths, wanted "to get at the historical blackness and truth of it . . . to take it to its most extreme away from the seaside [amusement park] Punch and Judy land." Griffiths became aware of the Harrison Birtwistle opera of Punch and Judy that stretched conventional understanding of the play to its limits--perfect for the film's avant-garde concept. Because it was more an artistic interpretation than a straight historical documentary, Rodney Wilson at the Arts Council agreed to the proposal, as it aligned with the Council's mandate. Griffiths undertook massive amounts of research, and was successful in his search for additional funding, including from the BBC. He was still working in commercials and started a production company to allocate the funds. The live-action sequences were filmed in theatres around London and they used voice tapes that Griffiths had compiled with various 'Punch and Judy men'. In Punch and Judy: Tragical Comedy or Comical Tragedy (1980), the Quays' animated sequences were based on early drawings and illustrations that were integrated into the live-action documentary framework. In a review of the film, Mark Le Fanu suggested that the film benefited from Griffiths contribution to the script: "For the first time the collaborators mixed their elements: mime, masque, painting, archive footage, finally (most ingeniously) opera--puppet highlights of a one-act drama by Harrison Birtwistle."²⁹ Punch and

²⁹ Le Fanu, 1984, p. 136.

Judy was a great success--it was broadcast on the BBC arts programme which meant the film accessed audiences that most independent short filmmakers could only dream of. It received a very positive review from then Time Out TV critic John Wyver. Meeting Wyver was another coincidence, another piece of luck for Griffiths (and the Quays), as Wyver turned from criticism to producing programmes on culture and art and became supportive of Griffiths' own endeavours.³⁰ In 1983, Punch and Judy was screened at the Annecy Animation Festival in France, where it won the Emile Reynaud prize. In the film's credits, Griffiths was listed as 'realisateur', which caused some misunderstandings. Griffiths:

At this point, in terms of correcting history, we had to come up with the notion of how to credit it. The twins said--well, you realised the film, it was your realisation, why don't we just say credit: realisation Keith Griffiths, and we'll put down animation etc.

Although he didn't direct the film, being credited as 'realisateur', Griffiths was referred to as its director, a misconception that was to prove somewhat awkward.

In the early 80s Griffiths' production company had reached an impasse. Griffiths: "I was still working in commercials, and I couldn't see any way that we could continue to work. They'd been through the system--they had had their BFI film, they got a bit of money from [the Greater London Art Association], and at that time you weren't ever given more than one grant, really." The twins had been in London for a few years now on yearly visas, and the Home Office had even caused some problems, threatening non-renewal. As non-British artists, they had to prove that they could support themselves. Griffiths helped them with their paperwork, engaged lawyers and eventually they were granted permanent residency status. They started research on the new film, this time an artist documentary, based on the avant-garde Belgian dramatist Michel de Ghelderode (1898-1962), whose sometimes unsettling works engaged with folklore, puppets and various forms of intense human experience. It was also the Quay Brothers' first funded work with actors, a young troupe run by a Polish director, who caused a few problems, since he wanted to direct them. The filmmakers incorporated imagery and set design, as with their student film Der Loop der Loop, that was inspired by Valerian Borowczyk's Goto--L'île d'amour (1968). Griffiths: "It was a wonderful experience researching it. We had a great time finding archives, looking into the whole world of Ensor and marionettes.

³⁰ Wyver is currently head of Illuminations, an association of independent production companies (including Griffiths') that specialise in television, film and multimedia productions

It was the twins' idea, they had a huge book on Michel de Ghelderode." Again a coincidence: during his student theatre days in Leicester, Griffiths' troupe had put on a de Ghelderode play, so he was keen on the project, and he managed to sell the idea to the Arts Council.

The Eternal Day of Michel de Ghelderode 1898-1962 (1981) was co-produced by the BFI. The Quays had seen the Marionette Theatre in Brussels and incorporated archival material about De Ghelderode into the film and texts from his Théâtre Complet (I-V), including interviews, letters and prose. This foreshadows a script development method that was used in the later artists' documentaries and some of the shorts, drawing not only on prose fragments, but also intertwining details about an author's life and concepts of the world. But the project may have been too ambitious. Griffiths:

The film was a bit of a disaster. We technically screwed up. We shot it on reversal film in order to get brilliant Technicolor-type colours. We didn't expose it properly, neither in the live-action nor the animation. We didn't realise how little latitude we had . . . It was an interesting experiment, but I think all the [artist documentary] films are interesting experiments.

The film is self-reflexive and mixes marionette theatre mixed with live action. As was to be the case with so many of the twins' films, the experimentation with live action would resurface later in more amenable conditions.

Channel Four Artists' Documentaries

The 70s British film crisis and the resulting financial vacuum evoked a series of reactions that were to prove fortuitous for the Quays. The shrinking interest of international film audiences initiated attention to new and younger filmmakers and their independent and experimental approaches to the medium. Not an isolated development except in that it conquered the hegemony of realism, in the protest and counter-culture years after 1968 a series of film collectives developed that were independent in a radical sense and in 1974 the 'Independent Filmmakers Association' was founded. Although they remained isolated from the commercial mainstream, these collectives were to contribute to the development of new British Cinema. They drafted a proposal for cultural film support and demanded a voice in defining the mandate for the new fourth public television broadcaster. Their radical efforts

ensured that the Channel Four film department, established in 1982, set up a section dedicated to commissioning independent film and video productions, and Margaret Dickinson notes that "By 1984 many IFA activists were working for, or funded by, the new Channel Four . . . Within ten years the IFA and nearly all the other structures which promoted oppositional film-making were gone."³¹ This brief but intense climate of innovation prepared the way towards developing new methods and approaches to feature films; it also opened a new source of funding and broadcasting for short films and it was a combination of factors that provided new opportunities for new filmmakers, from which the Quays were also to benefit.

Public television's commissioning policies, and the political and social consequences of the Thatcher era and its politics of privatisation had a positive effect on British independent film production. The BBC and ITV received the order to commission external, independent film producers. And since ITV was to give a percentage of its advertising income to Channel Four, considerable funding flowed into the commissioning budgets. Channel Four's commissioning practice was to become an important factor for the Quay Brothers' first ventures into commissioned filmmaking. Griffiths has called Channel Four, when it began, "the most enlightened TV station on the planet, to put money in and not worry about the audience in terms of how many people might be watching these films". Because they were broadcast to British homes, directors were able to access audiences and audience numbers that would have been sheer impossible to attain in art house cinemas. The audience's attention was captured by the innovative stylistic developments and by a shift from traditional British themes. Channel Four's financing politics supported animation film in an unprecedented way: the majority of independent British animation films were co-financed by the broadcaster, and fruitful partnership for the Koninck Studios had begun.

But again it needed more than good scripts to get commissioned. Griffiths had written an article for Broadcast Magazine (now Broadcast Newspaper), called "The Television Laboratory", based on his experiences of the American public broadcaster WNET / 13 that set up an experimental television lab in New York in 1972. Griffiths' interests and his engagement with the WNET film lab were taken up by Channel Four's Chief Executive, Jeremy Issacs, who had read his article: "Jeremy called me and said 'come and talk to me'. He said it was a really interesting idea and asked whether I thought Channel Four could have a laboratory like this." Issacs was convinced and, after ensuing discussions with others, including Wyver, he set up the

³¹ Dickinson, 1999, p. 62.

department in 1981 that came to be called Independent Film & Video. Griffiths wrote a letter to Issacs stating that he would like to make some animation with the Quays. Issacs had been very impressed by Nocturna Artificialia, and by Punch and Judy when it was broadcast on the BBC. He suggested Griffiths speak with Walter Donohue (an editor of the Faber & Faber Projections publications series) who was determined to find interesting ideas in the early set-up days of the channel. Its new Knightsbridge location had as yet no offices to speak of (Griffiths remembers sitting on tea chests). Aware of the opportunity, but also that Channel Four would not commission an animation film as such, he suggested to the Quays that they craft another concept for two artists' documentaries on composers, to take it further this time and plan a strategy for how to secure funding; they decided on Igor Stravinsky and Leos Janacek.

Music rights were expensive, and a suggestion from Gwyn Rhydderch to investigate other options, including piano rolls owned by Rex Lawson, evolved into a financially feasible approach. They delved into the libraries and archives, drafted ideas and put together a treatment. Griffiths approached Lawson, whom he knew from his RCA days and who was familiar with Griffiths' student film The Music Machine, entirely about mechanical music apparatus. With a viable script in hand, Channel Four provided some funding for further research on both Stravinsky and Janacek, including trips to Brno. Griffiths: "We decided very early that [the two films] should look very different. One should look Modernist, be about Paris, and be funny, and the other would be broody, romantic." An animated biography for television, this film takes a playful look at the private life of composer Igor Stravinsky, whose music had long been favoured by the Quays.

Igor--The Paris Years Chez Pleyel (1982) loosely describes a humorous, chaotic encounter between composer Igor Stravinsky, painter Jean Cocteau and poet Vladimir Majakovsky. More slapstick and personal than sober, factual biography, it has a significant amount of absurd dialogue, with Majakovsky shouting Communist propaganda tirades intermittently throughout, excerpts from his writings while in Paris. The character design is playful and unique in that most of the sets and puppets are a composition of found objects reminiscent of Hannah Höch's collage artwork: cutouts of magazines, graphic illustrations, architectural lithographs and etchings and photographs. The later films also use sculptural collage techniques, but the materials are mostly made by the Quays themselves. Cocteau is effete, and the puppets' plaster fingers already fixed in the delicate gesture that many of their later puppets' hands have--fingers bent on one hand, extended and slightly apart on the

other, almost pointing. The animation is intercut with Rex Lawson at the pianola, operating the rolls of Stravinsky's music. These scenes are in black and white, and help remind us that the film is, in fact, about the composer. The film is 'interrupted' with Stravinsky's dream, and the 'Petruschka' marionette theatre sequence was shot in live action without dialogue, with the three puppet cutout heads transposed on different marionette bodies and costumes. Stravinsky wakes up, and the film ends with Lawson at the pianola. The film is overall very colourful, unexpectedly playful, and relatively bright in its lighting, exhibiting the Quays' inventiveness of melding graphic design, illustration and fanciful objects. It also reveals their unusual camera skills that are refined later films: calibrated tracking shots and a significant amount of camera movement for single-frame animated shooting.

The second artists' film was more sober and structured. In Leos Janacek: Intimate Excursions (1983) a monologue voice-over guides us through the thoughts and biographical account of Janacek, a puppet with a photograph of his face standing in for a head. The film has distinct segments of seven pieces of music that are interpreted by using different sets and puppets. It begins with an animated tram passing from left to right, a photograph is approached with a mix of tracking shot and focus pull, followed by live-action shots of puppet and marionette sets, and then the film shifts to the animated realm. Most of the film takes place in Janacek's 'home', and the musical pieces are flights of fancy that feature insects, a drunken man beside a stylised image of a Czech village, an opera stage with an insect-like female singer with feathers for hands and on her head, a winged puppet and foxes beating on the window while Janacek sleeps. These are all united in the forest at the end in the final piece of music. The technical elements of the film are already familiar: focus pulls, slow, patient tracking shots through the sets, moving mostly from right to left. The imagery is more subdued but the set design has elements from Nocturna Artificialia: thick black Expressionistic calligraphed lines, diagonal windows and openings cut into walls, and again the use of chiaroscuro lighting sets a sombre mood, unlike the bright lights and colours that dominate the Stravinsky film. In the television-commissioned documentaries and biographies directed together with Griffiths, the puppets used to portray historically prominent artists are enhanced with gravity and humour by the puppet constructions that represent them through their playful movements to music. In Janacek, for instance, the composite of a head made of an oversize bent portrait photograph and a floppy puppet body confronts us with an oddly burlesque death mask effect, yet also suggests clues to the inner life of the composer.

The Quays moved into a more spacious location in the early 80s, a loft in Borough close to London's South Bank. At this time, the area was a preferred location of filmmakers and production companies. In the meantime, like many of the neglected London boroughs it is undergoing 'gentrification' and urban renewal. Besides the surreptitious infiltration of posh newcomers in pockets of the neighbourhood, the street the atelier is on has remained relatively unchanged. The move coincided with significant changes for Griffiths: he was having financial difficulties and keen to move on. He was asked by Simon Hartog to join a coop of radical filmmakers called SPECTRE and formed a subsidiary called 'Large Door', a verbal pun on Buñuel's L'Age D'Or. They won a contract with Channel Four for a regular magazine programme called VISIONS about international cinema (excluding North American film).

Griffiths and the Quays were in Prague around this time, and interested in seeing some films from a filmmaker and artist named Jan Svankmajer they had heard about and seen a few films from. They were shown two films at a screening organised by the state Czech government in a theatre. Griffiths and the twins were introduced to a translator over dinner who knew Svankmajer and arranged for them to meet. Griffiths:

Svankmajer was clearly interested and fascinated. We asked to see his films and he said--'of course, come by tomorrow to Laterna Magica workshops and I show you. I have my own prints.' The whole time we were talking I was transcribing Michael's translation and we said to him would you let us make a film about you. I think he said 'no', initially, or 'provided I'm not in it'.

The twins and Griffiths visited to the studio the next day; it was snowing, the electricity in Prague was intermittent. They were taken upstairs in an edit room with an old Steenbeck and piles of films on the floor. Svankmajer ran all the films for them on the Steenbeck, a translator explaining the Czech words and translating Svankmajer's comments. At some point they looked up from the Steenbeck and saw that the room was full of people who heard that Svankmajer was showing his films and came to look over the top of their shoulders. The Quays also recall their first meeting with Svankmajer:

He [Svankmajer] was rather suspicious and stand-offish but that was very understandable for those times. (1983 Prague: still under a communist regime) Who was this trio from London? Subsequently having seen what we did with the material he relaxed and over the years he's become increasingly warmer and warmer. The two of us know the profound experience this man's work (along with his friendship and that of Eva, his wife, a painter)--has been for us. He and Eva have created ceaselessly and in virtual obscurity often under great difficulty and outright suppression an entire body of work of astonishing richness and variety.³²

Back in London, exhilarated by what they saw, Griffiths and the Quays decided to make a documentary on Svankmajer for Channel Four's VISIONS cinema arts series. Animation was becoming recognised as a key component absent from other broadcasters' schedules except in the form of children's series or holiday specials. Outsourcing independent film production was part of the Channel Four's remit, as was commissioning animation for adult audiences (the station's innovative policy and risk-taking resulted in a 'Renaissance' of British animation that has been unparalleled since).³³

The Quays contributed animated segments to a longer artist's documentary The Cabinet of Jan Svankmajer, Prague's Alchemist of Film in 1984, a 53 minute film was directed by Griffiths and broadcast in the UK and abroad. According to the Quays, Griffiths strategically drafted the project around one word--Surrealism--strategic because Prague surrealism was alive and well.³⁴ It was scripted in nine episodes that included information about and interviews with Svankmajer, a leading figure in the Prague Surrealist group that he joined in 1970, and it was drafted using extracts from Svankmajer's films, and didactic inserts about surrealism, Rudolf II and Archimboldo. Griffiths arranged for whom he called "wonderful surrealists"--Robert Benayoun, Paul Hammond, Roger Cardinal--to come into the studio and talk about Svankmajer in front of a blue screen. He arranged for them to see the films, directed the interviews and edited them. The animation sequences were subcontracted via Large Door to Koninck Studio, and the Quays fabricated around 14 minutes of puppet animation made up of vignettes which set out to introduce each extract of

³² Interview with Chris Robinson, June 2001.

³³ Collaboration with schemes such as the Museum of the Moving Image and the Arts Council of Great Britain (from which Arts Council England sprung in 1994) (emphasising experimental and independent animation) also ensured that all types of animation from all parts of the community--large and small studios, independents, low-budget work--would be represented.

³⁴ Interview with Chris Robinson, June 2001.

Svankmajer's that they had chosen which were based on specific Svankmajerian themes. These were intercut with clips from Svankmajer's films and the talking heads to create the finished documentary.

Griffiths' interest in Svankmajer did not end with this film--on the contrary, it was the beginning of a sustained collaboration. He related a fascinating tale of intrigue and somewhat dodgy financial practices, canny Swiss producers, visa problems, interrogations and surveillance, double agents and unconventional border crossings of film material. It shall remain an unwritten account of the more difficult aspects of producing Svankmajer's first feature Alice, made in a pre-revolutionary time when Svankmajer was not allowed to make films in Czechoslovakia. Griffiths: "it was a fait accompli." The adventure paid off for production companies, the filmmaker and audiences: since then, Griffiths has produced or co-produced most of Svankmajer's features, including Alice (1987) Faust (1994), The Conspirators of Pleasure (1996) and Little Otek (2000)

The puppet animation segments were released as a short film: The Cabinet of Jan Svankmajer, also in 1984. The Quays consider their film a homage to Svankmajer, whose animation films delve into the surrealist unconscious using clay animation, live action and collage. In the film, a pupil-teacher relationship which unfolds; an Archimboldo-esque alchemist who pulls the toads and snails and puppy-dogs' tails from his prodigy's cotton-wool filled brain, pushing them off the table ledge with a sweep of his compass-armature arm. What follows is a lesson in animated cinema: learning the camera's single-frame mechanism, interludes in the metaphysical playroom turn animistic, deadness is brought to life in the drawer-lined workshop's sammelsurium; fragments of cloth, bird's eggs, powders and mysterious constructions. The spectator is 'walked through' the various compartments and chambers--possibly what the Quays imagined to be the surrealist playrooms of Svankmajer's imagination.

The 'Twist Point'

The next film in the Quay Brothers' filmography was scripted by Griffiths and intended to be part of a longer film based on the epic of Gilgamesh. Little Songs of the Chief Officer of Hunar Louse, or This Unnameable Little Broom (1985) was commissioned as a development by David Rose at Film Four, who had commissioned the Janacek and Stravinsky films. This was the first approach to

developing a feature film that required experience neither the Quays nor Griffiths yet had. Griffiths:

[We were] not fully comprehending the changes that [Derek] Jarman and [Peter] Greenaway were making in terms of narrative to get [their] films made. You might say Caravaggio and The Draughtsman's Contract are pretty wacky, but nevertheless the backbone, the spine, was much more conventionally narrative than [the Quays] were yet engaged with. So it took us much longer to make that transition.

Working from an original script by Alain Passes and the Quays, with contributions from Griffiths' own research of the epic, they developed a script for a longer film. That included many ideas about live action and animation. At the start of the project, the Quays were not that interested in the subject, but as the project proceeded, it became more attractive. After the three artist documentaries, this was the first text-based narrative film. The Quays' recount how they approached the project:

'Gilgamesh' is a legend, not a myth. It's an epic, 'The Epic of Gilgamesh'. We just narrowed it down. I don't know, I suppose it can [be done] because of the imagery. We never set out to make the epic into a fairy tale -we said 'let's just make another movie'.³⁵

It was one of a number of projects they were working on at the time, trying to expand them into feature length projects, including Aleksandr Luria's book The Man With a Shattered World. They actually did a treatment for this and Griffiths says that the twins did some terrific imagery, but the Gilgamesh project was a priority. Rose suggested they make a pilot with live action and animation integrated, and they shot some dance and performance-based sequences with choreographer Kim Brandstrup, who Griffiths calls "their first dance/performance 'guru', a serious choreographer, performer and friend." As the live action and animation was a difficult fit, the animation became a self-contained film, and the feature could not be realised because of insufficient funding. The BFI Animation Catalogue includes the following synopsis:

³⁵ Quay Brothers interview, 1996.

A macabre tale with a theatrical mise en scène peopled with grotesque models and where savage, vindictive machines whirr, slice, decapitate and imprison the unwary. It has the cold articulation of malignancy and evil commonly associated with the horrific fantasies of children's stories.³⁶

The actions of these bizarre and antagonistic puppets takes place in what appears to be a room floating in space. The Quays intended it to be a floating world, where they didn't feel the need to justify the organisation of space. "We had four walls, and the images. And originally, we thought, 'Oh gosh, it has to be on the ground, and you have to see some black around it'. Well we said: 'No, make it an abyss'".³⁷ They confirmed that it seemed there was no real effort on their part to explain anything in the film:

And for ourselves we imagined that we were taking a huge risk, because even we weren't sure. But it actually freed us, and we made sure in the framing that we were conjugating a whole space by constantly moving around, underneath and above, and that you feel that there is black out there. When Enkidou arrives, he just flies in from the black, and there are wires going off. We felt that they were connected somewhere in outer space. And it was a good lesson, and that playing with space like that really helped us with [Street of] Crocodiles.³⁸

According to Griffiths, this film marked the end of a period of a particular production mode--which mostly meant working with Griffiths--and a shift to a certain independence that began with their next film:

We haven't got to the period that the Quays now define as the beginning of their work and the rest of the work doesn't count, that it doesn't exist any more. We've come to that dam now [in this 2002 interview], a strange turning point in their nature. It's an interesting twist point.

The 'twist point' is Street of Crocodiles, a film that continues to capture the imagination of filmgoers more than twenty years after its release. While the Quays may now regard some of the films described in this chapter as Griffiths' work, his

³⁶ Stewart, Heather, 45.

³⁷ Quay Brothers interview 1996.

³⁸ Ibid.

engagement, vision and enthusiasm and his canny ability at fundraising and initiating projects is an important chapter in their work as filmmakers. Griffiths will continue to be instrumental in their future work. Theirs is a complex, intellectual, aesthetic and intimate relationship based on mutual interests and convictions, and the films to this point in their filmography evince a shared vision of the 'world' that their combined efforts in puppet animation have given to their audiences around the globe. The Quay Brothers' work has inspired Griffiths to long-time engagement: "I just like backing the work and I don't know the reason for it, but in some way it provokes me, and if it provokes me I find a way of it provoking an audience." According to Griffiths, some film financiers regard his role as a producer as very peculiar: "I am very different from most UK producers . . . I follow a film right the way through, and keep going when most producers stop. These films need to be promoted. That's the nature of an independent and radical cinema." As a committed producer of independent and auteur films, Griffiths continues to pursue his own unique and dedicated philosophy and strategies to secure audiences and funding for this kind of filmmaking.

Street of Crocodiles was a watershed for the Quay Brothers, not only in terms of recognition as artists, but also as a consolidation and refinement of many of the experiments they had undertaken in the years before. In this film, the Quays developed significant formal visual neologisms that, in spite of their complexity in this film, became technical and narrative points of departure for the films made after 1986. This was also the first film completely independent of some form of external collaboration or imposed form: neither a suggested theme nor a commissioned documentary, not co-scripted and not co-directed. The distinctness of this film, this 'twist point' in developments in the Quays' poetics is why this film is the focal point for four chapters that investigate their works' poetics. As the Quays increasingly engaged with a specific type of literature, to understand the preproduction concepts and processes from this point in their works and their relations to literary stylistics the next chapter provides a theoretical and conceptual framework for philosophical and stylistic explorations, followed by a focus on a triumvirate of authors who are discussed in terms of shared philosophical and stylistic tendencies.

Chapter 4. Palimpsests, Fragments, Vitalist Affinities

To say the poetic image is independent of causality is to make a rather serious statement. But the causes cited by psychologists and psychoanalysts can never really explain the wholly unexpected nature of the new image, any more than they can explain the attraction it holds for a mind that is foreign to the process of its creation.

Gaston Bachelard, The Poetics of Space, 1994

Now that we are equipped with a sense of the Quays' creative origins and their trajectory from the USA to London, from illustration to the moving image, this chapter will unfold some of the literary thematic and aesthetic origins that the later work commencing with Street of Crocodiles engages with--literature being a main instigator of the 'twist point' that incited a significant shift in their aesthetics. What is striking about the Quay Brothers' films is the combination of references they choose, ranging from painting, early optical experiments, puppet theatre, literature, surrealism, expressionism and Baroque architecture to musical structures, Polish poster design, dance and illustration. These references are primary motifs in many of the films, and often the sense of narrative develops out of how these isolated references are strung together. Not a compendium of their varied and wide-ranging interests in the arts, the aim here is more to illuminate some of what I discern are key literary influences in their work that emerge in their films. This chapter explores specific literary techniques that transmute into many of their films and that are particularly suited to being interpreted via puppet animation, literary texts that have undercurrent metaphysical or animistic agendas. Part of the attraction to their work is the abundant mix of occluded literary references. As early as 1984 they were aware of the difficulty these could pose to uninitiated viewers: "Sometimes we are shocked by how few references people have to the literature and music that have driven us for fifteen years. It makes us feel elitist by default."¹ The Quays have accumulated a profound and yet intimate literary knowledge: in each of the films, this knowledge is distilled into a different style, sometimes novel, more often an addition to the partial recombination of previous styles that each film embodies. The Quays comment on their approach to written texts:

¹ Petley, 1986 (2), pp. 34-35.

You read poetry in a very privileged moment, and you know you have to apply yourself, that intellectually you are in for a challenge and that is the difference between people who would read a popular novel and those who would read poetry or Joyce or would tackle a South American writer.²

Considered together as an opus, similarities between each film and its predecessors suggest a continuum of development distinct from the earlier films.

At the end of The Cabinet of Jan Svankmajer, the little boy's empty hole on the top of his skull is filled with a pert sheaf of pages, a petite version of the master's who places it there. The sheaf is a metonymic trope for what the boy has learned--knowledge is literally sprouting from his head, an apt analogy for the pages, passages and short stories that the Quays have collected over the years, an omnium gatherum of the wisps and fragments resting on pages in dusty volumes and notebooks that line their studio walls. This scene may be a tribute to the Quays' occupation with and indebtedness to printed matter of all varieties--their studio walls, glass cabinets, shelves and nooks are loaded with volumes of prose, poetry, history, pre- and post-Enlightenment scientific manuals, thick encyclopaedias, antiquarian finds of French, German and Latin American authors, oversize tomes on photography, painting, illustration, graphic design, cinema and architecture. Some of the humbler paperbacks have received a new set of clothes--the old ones have been replaced by covers embellished in stark black, flowing ink in ornate Quay calligraphy. Leafing through the books one finds richly illustrated pages of sexual pathology (Richard von Krafft-Ebing's Psychopathia Sexualis) and favourite artists and conceptual works (The Bachelor Machines / Le Macchine Celibi curated by Harald Szeeman) that seep into their films, and early optical studies and cabbalistic science provide a clue to the themes of vision that the Quays' camera and lighting design creates. Their De Artificiali Perspectiva or Anamorphosis (1990), an arts-documentary commission on the eponymous technique of subverting vision, deals with some of these concepts. The metaphysical and animistic potential of animation film may be the art form most aptly suited to investigate these sixteenth and seventeenth century magical and scientific investigations. And all of these books, collected over years of bibliophile wanderings throughout the world, ultimately feed

² Quay Brothers interview, 2000.

an idea, are inspiration for an image, a composition, a set, a puppet, a line of script, a sound, a gesture.

The Quay Brothers' filmmaking activity has been consistently interspersed throughout with other artistic commissions. In the present context, it is not trivial to note that the ornate calligraphy and aesthetic sensibility gained during their training as illustrators found its way to magazine pages and book covers: illustrations were how they initially began developing collage and graphic concepts that fed into the films' styles. Besides the unsatisfying Gothic and science fiction book cover commissions they did while in Philadelphia, the Quays have created suggestive designs for a variety of publications that seem to reflect not only their own interests in particular authors--covers for Italo Calvino, Paul Céline or poet Mark le Fanu (one of their first critics)--but also in themes and motifs that these books develop. They designed the cover of Steve Weiner's novel Museum of Love, published in 1994, an illustration of an antlered table with legs (an image from the Stille Nacht III (1993) short the Quays made as a preamble to the first feature). In "The Quay Brothers Dictionary", in a booklet that accompanies the recent BFI DVD collection, Michael Brooke notes that in art school project the Quays designed an album cover for Karlheinz Stockhausen and later designed the cover for Jonathan Cott's Stockhausen, Conversations with the Composer, almost three decades before working with the composer on In Absentia.

The prowess in illustration and calligraphy seeps increasingly into many formal elements their later films--this is evident as graphic embellishment in the set decoration, their particular use of patterns in the puppets' costume design. Titles, intertitles and credits appear in a variety of handwritten styles, ranging from Expressionistic, angled texts in Nocturna Artificialia to the ornate curves and curls in In Absentia. An example of their illustration talents used for inventive cinematic graphic stylisation using animation is in Rehearsals for Extinct Anatomies (1987): A quill pen cavorts and pirouettes throughout the room, leaving a trail of ink behind that develops spirals, curves and varying thickness of calligraphic line. The graphic ornaments escape and course throughout the decors that they also define. Instead of embellishing the visual image, they become what the Quays describe as self-reflective 'poetic vessels', drawing attention to the potential of animation to free the line and the geometric object from their static forms on paper.

Wisps and Fragments: Cinematic Transpositions of Literature

Mark Le Fanu's ornate praise in the mid-1980s initiated what became a literary-tinged metalanguage for describing the Quay Brothers' works. His elaborate analyses evinced an engagement that went beyond standard journalistic summaries. In a single article "Modernism, Eccentrism: The Austere Art of Atelier Koninck"--that is only partly concerned with Atelier Koninck, the remainder is a call to recognise the arts and literary origins of their animation--the attributes and terms "macabre", 'nightmare', 'anodyne', 'metaphysical', 'pathological', 'grotesque', 'compulsion', 'alienation', 'entomological', 'lyricism', 'haunted', 'homage' and 'excavation' are used to describe the Quays' films³. These words have crept into almost any international review one can find in their work, whether in German, Polish, Spanish, French or others outside the lingua franca. Later recurring words that can be added to the list include: 'kafkaesque', 'marginal', 'uncanny', 'phantom', 'fragile', 'obscure', 'labyrinthine', 'eroticism', 'melancholia', 'decay', 'cinephilic', 'unsettling', 'surreal', 'dreamlike', 'mythic', 'pathos', 'poetic', 'delirium'. Michael Atkinson's 1994 article in Film Comment summarising the Quays' work gives a possible reason why critics' response to the films have been inundated with this kind of phenomenological and metaphysical terminology:

Street of Crocodiles, The Cabinet of Jan Svankmajer, Nocturna Artificialia, The [sic] Unnameable Little Broom, Rehearsals for Extinct Anatomies, The Comb From the Museum of Sleep, and the Stille Nacht pieces are all ferociously hermetic films whose interface with everyday culture is both undeniable and nearly impossible to articulate. Nowhere else has film so leanly and effortlessly rippled the dark subconscious waters ebbing under the surface of our collective experience.⁴

While some of these terms have been heavily used in Quay-related film criticism, many of them are appropriate and precise attributes that allude to a palette of literary pathopsychological, aesthetic, perceptual and art-historical themes that is mixed and remixed in their films. Of themselves they declare: "We always had a similar, literary interest. We constantly absorbed the same material."⁵ Instead of interpreting a story per se, the Quays tend to gather literary and poetic fragments and elements, tropes, metaphors and moods. The Quays description of how they

³ Le Fanu, 1984.

⁴ Atkinson, 1994, p. 36.

⁵ Nichols Goodeve, 1996, p. 85.

select writings they work with also gives an indication of their interdisciplinary sources and methods:

The fact that we might use a literary source but transpose it into an imagistic/sound realm happens only if we intuitively feel that it can be transposed and then augmented, opened out. Musicians throughout history have taken literary sources to compose tone poems, symphonies and even opera; and then on top of that music, a choreographer creates a ballet, and on and on it goes.⁶

As almost all of the Quay Brothers' films after This Unnameable Little Broom are loosely based on literature, it is important to understand the particular features of how animation can be particularly suited to transposition of written texts that converge on a character's experiences of things and surroundings via cinematic imagery and sound. Literary texts figure in their film projects, whether they serve as a point of departure for their own ideas or as a textual basis for filmic interpretation: "In a way it's not like saying, here's a paragraph, and we're going to set this paragraph, we're going to film this paragraph, we never worked like that."⁷ As will become apparent in a subsequent chapter, like some authors, the Quays' films pay attention to isolated objects, sometimes more so than to relationships between puppets, figures are often at a loss to deal with the inner life of these objects as they move in intricate patterns in the spaces and soundscapes that surround them. These assemblages and material configurations are animated through the realms of human thought, dream and experience, in this case, from the world of literature.⁸

Certain literary genres and writing styles have an affinity with animation techniques, especially those with elements from fairy tales, Romanticism, fantasy and science fiction. There is a body of writing with a particularly fertile hub in Europe that includes E.T.A. Hoffmann, Friedrich Hölderlin, Witold Gombrowicz, Heinrich von Kleist, Antonin Artaud, and Ludwig Tieck and later especially Franz Kafka, Robert Walser and Bruno Schulz. Critical reflection on the scope and variety of this writing is expansive, so the focus here is on authors the Quays favour who invoke a leitmotif that lends itself in an astonishing way to the technique of puppet animation. It is a preoccupation with the imagined inner life of objects, of puppets and automata, often seen through the eyes of an omniscient author or a main protagonist

⁶ Quay Brothers' correspondence with Chris Robinson, 2001.

⁷ Quay Brothers interview, 1992.

⁸ Some of these ideas evolved in conversation with Richard Weihe, to whom I am grateful.

who is enchanted by his or her imagined interaction with them. These objects, interpreted by the Quays and given material form, become cinematic equivalents of literary description, a *deus ex machina*, a theatrical device that is also a performative manifestation of the concept of vitalism. 'Machinery', in literary terms collectively refers to actants in a text. The human figure is paired, in binary opposition, with the non-human creatures and inanimate objects. Central to the authors mentioned is the imaginary unity on the part of the human (or anthropomorphic puppet) actant with the inanimate objects and puppets; the former is faced with the impossibility of translating this perceived unity into a state of interaction that makes sense in his or her physical world. The result is often anticathartic, and results in delirium, alienation or tragedy (Hoffman's Nathaniel with the automaton Olympia, Schulz's father and his wrestling with matter, Kafka's insectal metamorphosis of Gregor Samsa).

The Quays' cinematic transmutations of literature tend mainly to delve into the images of the mind, both psychological and pathological. They bear comparison with Antonin Artaud's aesthetic engagement with the sick mind and the sick body, or his concept of a Theatre of Cruelty.⁹ In a critique of Ludwig Tieck's "The Cup of Gold", Artaud suggests that Tieck's writing recalls a lost romanticism that is subsumed under what happens to our adult minds: "Perhaps we do live in the mind, but what a larval, skeletal, foetal life it remains, where all the simplest intellectual steps, sifted by our rotten minds, turn into some ominous dust, some grotesque posturing or other."¹⁰ Some of the Quays' interpretations of literature recall not the romantic notions of innocence, but rather the images of the mind that Artaud describes. The life of the mind translates visually into the grotesque and Expressionistic architecture and puppets in the films; even the dust has a disturbing life of its own.

Cinematic Metaphor

In an interview about his collaboration with animation filmmaker David Anderson on the script for *Deadsy* (1989) author Russell Hoban speculates on the relation between animated film and human thought¹¹:

⁹ Hayman, in Rowell, 1996, pp 20-24.

¹⁰ Artaud, 1971, vol. 2, p. 197.

¹¹ Anderson was fascinated by Hoban's anarchic experimentation with language and used a variety of techniques to visualise Hoban's trans-gendered, destructive character 'Deadsy'.

Animation, I think, lends itself to interesting word/picture combinations, and I think you can write with complete freedom, as if you're writing a poem, a little fragment of something, a short burst of ideas . . . I think that more and more our ordinary perception has been speeded up and fragmented, so we are accustomed to taking in a whole lot more data and many more images than we ever did before . . . The human mind works in a non-linear way . . . A better harmony has to come about between the inner voices and the recognised ones, between the unbidden pictures and the pictures we allow ourselves to see . . . animation and experimental film are very good for encouraging this sort of thing.¹²

Hoban succinctly describes the synthesis of word and image, the cocreational impulse generated by 'unbidden pictures' and those we allow ourselves to see, in text and in film. Hoban has written a number of novels (including *Riddley Walker*, 1998) that deconstruct language and, using a portmanteau technique (similar to James Joyce or Anthony Burgess) he reworks extant vocabulary, idiom and syntax, creating a new language. As the Quay Brothers' animation films have virtually no spoken dialogue, it is pertinent that Hoban also stresses the creative process of writing and the relation between the non-linear processes of thought and inner voice, a creative process similar to the intuition the Quays mention in their own methods. That animation 'lends itself to interesting word/picture combinations' is an essential quality of the animated form. Rudolf Arnheim has some relevant thoughts on the creative process of writing and its inherent freedoms:

The writer is not tied to the physical concreteness of a given setting; therefore, he is free to connect one object with another even though in actuality the two may not be neighbours either in time or in space. And since he uses as his material not the actual percept but its conceptual name, he can compose his images of elements that are taken from disparate sensory sources. He does not have to worry whether the combinations he creates are possible or even imaginable in the physical world. . . . The writer operates on what I called the second or higher level, at which the visual and auditory arts also discover their kinship. We understand now why the writer can fuse the rustling of the wind, the

¹² This remark was transcribed from an interview which is part of a Connaissance video compilation on David Anderson's works.

sailing of the clouds, the odour of rotting leaves, and the touch of raindrops on the skin into one genuine unity.¹³

The synaesthetic effect Arnheim mentions is affectively available in animation as well, and his concepts also resonate with Hoban's word/picture combinations. The animator is also 'not tied to the physical concreteness of a given setting'. Although the Quays work in dimensional animation, which means that the spaces and objects they use are materials from our everyday world, they can circumvent and bend laws of space, perspective and continuity, to a greater degree than possible in live action set design, creating combinations and events that are not possible to experience in the lived, physical world (I discuss this in more detail in Chapter 5).

The Quay Brothers' films often evoke a nightmarish, dreamlike mood, a quality that unites their preferred authors. In Susan Stewart's delectable On Longing. Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection she describes narratives as structures of desire. She defines three meanings of longing; her third meaning is enlightening in the present context:

The third meaning of longing, "belongings or appurtenances", continues this story of the generation of the subject. I am particularly interested here in the capacity of narrative to generate significant objects and hence to both generate and engender a significant other. Simultaneously, I focus upon the place of that other in the formation of a notion of the interior.¹⁴

The 'notion of an interior', the trope of an 'inner world' peopled or occupied by animistic objects that we cannot experience in the phenomenal world runs through the writings the Quays declare as their inspirations. For a cinematic representation of the mood of Walser's "Dornröschen", in The Comb (From the Museums of Sleep) (1990) for instance, description is 'translated' into the visual medium by stylisation of objects in space. The 'sleeping beauty' is mostly immobile except for isolated and repetitive gesture of a finger that fitfully wiggles. This gesture is repeated by a puppet's hand in the animated segments intercut with the reclined woman. Her dream world comes alive for the viewer: a coloured, animated world is the physical and spatial equivalent of her dream imagery, populated by fragments and a

¹³ Arnheim, 1958, p. 170. Author emphasis.

¹⁴ Stewart, 1993, p. xi.

determined by a certain incoherence that is also a feature of dream states. Stewart offers a way of understanding such narratives:

By means of its conventions of depiction, temporality, and, ultimately, closure, narrative here seeks to "realize" a certain formulation of the world. Hence we can see the many narratives that dream of the inanimate-made-animate as symptomatic of all narrative's desire to invent a realizable world, a world which "works".¹⁵

The Quay Brothers' films enchant because they enable us to experience a miniature, visible world of the inanimate made animate, a world that 'works' according to the 'rules' the Quays invoke for the realm. Yet it is alienated from our experience of the phenomenal world and reveals the inherent animism of the literary texts they draw upon. The world of the inanimate made animate is also the world of the fairy tale. The Quays propose "that perhaps not all fairy tales have to talk and that children can more readily tread water through narrative ellipses than the poor parents who are forever inflating the protective 'narrative' life preserver."¹⁶ Fairy tales are integrated into Walser's writings, and Schulz's writings have a fairy tale-like quality about them. Walter Benjamin brilliantly draws analogies between children's fascination with waste objects and his concept of the fairy tale:

Children are fond of haunting any site where things are being visibly worked on. They are irresistibly drawn by the detritus generated by building, gardening, housework, carpentry, tailoring or whatever. In these waste products they recognize the face that the world of things turns directly and solely to them. In using these things they do not so much imitate the works of adults as bring together materials of widely differing kinds in a new volatile relationship. Children thus produce their own small world of things within the larger one. The fairy-tale is such a waste product--perhaps the most powerful to be found in the spiritual life of humanity: a waste product that emerges from the growth and decay of the saga. With the stuff of fairy-tales the child may be as sovereign and

¹⁵ Ibid., p. xi-xii.

¹⁶ Quay Brothers, 1986, p. 1.

uninhibited as with rags and building blocks. Out of fairy-tale motifs the child constructs its world, or at least it forms a bond with these elements.¹⁷

The Quays are no strangers to Benjamin: "When we read his Reflections, his texts on postage stamp collections, on his library, it released a world to us. This is a man who knew about Kafka, Walser. In the same way Gaston Bachelard does, he opens these little cupboards."¹⁸ The way the Quays visualise fairy tale elements in their films is a collecting of material--the 'detritus' Benjamin speaks of--and rearranging it in a way that transforms it into a 'world' in which these materials' animistic properties prevail. Bringing 'materials of widely differing kinds' is a feature of their set and puppet constructions, and the 'volatile relationship' they create with these new constructions is part of the appeal their films have for spectators.

Another way to explain this 'volatile relationship' in the Quay Brothers' work between the mediums of literary text and film text is through the concept of visual metaphor. In his dialectical approach to film form through montage, Sergei Eisenstein suggests that a visual metaphor evokes a reaction in the viewer which is similar to the reader of a text which employs metaphoric tropes.¹⁹ Describing the *Street of Crocodiles*, Schulz creates imagery using similes and metaphor:

Only a few people noticed the peculiar characteristics of that district: the fatal lack of color, as if that shoddy, quickly-growing area could not afford the luxury of it. Everything was gray there, as in black-and-white photographs or in cheap illustrated catalogues. This similarity was real rather than metaphorical because at times, when wandering in those parts, one in fact gained the impression that one was turning the pages of a prospectus, looking at columns of boring commercial advertisements, among which suspect announcements nestled like parasites, together with dubious notices and illustrations with a double meaning.²⁰

A reader confronted with a passage such as this must necessarily involve own powers of imagination to elicit the transformation inherent in the metaphor. The trope of the district's fatal lack of colour, actually a figure of thought, allows the reader to create a visual image of the shabby street by insinuating a deathly pall that

¹⁷ Benjamin, 1999, pp 16-17.

¹⁸ Habib, 2001.

¹⁹ Eisenstein, 1949, pp 48-63.

²⁰ Schulz, 1977, p. 102.

evokes associations with consumption and other poverty-related illness. Another feature of the passage's rhythm is the simile between a wandering through the city and leafing through a cheap magazine; its parasitic 'suspect announcements' and 'dubious notices' all contribute to a criminally anthropomorphic, perhaps animistic, malicious undertow that seems to lurk in the shadows and keep the reader figuratively 'looking over' her shoulder. This creates a metaphorical trope by joining dissimilar ideas in such a way that it gives rise to a new figurative sense. An example of the Quays' transformation of this district is in the film's lighting and colour scheme—the main Street of Crocodiles set is lined by old shops with musty-looking bizarre objects in their windows. The main colour palette is various tones and shades of sepia, brown, black, grey and beige. Shot using crepuscular lighting, it is as if the film itself is old and faded, reduced to a single colour range, robbed of the cyan and magenta. I agree with Trevor Whittock's challenge that cinematic metaphor is not dependent on montage, that visual metaphor is created in "the link between the artist's conception and the spectator's cocreation of it. It posits the film image as mediating between the two."²¹ The spectator's involvement in apprehending the meaning of the literary and cinematic imagery described above image is enriched by familiarity with Schulz's writing, but it is not prerequisite to understanding the image.

Literary Cineantics: James Joyce, Portmanteau and Nonsense

There are other approaches that I regard as helpful towards understanding how texts relate to the Quays' cinematic images. Two in particular involve James Joyce's creative process and writing techniques and they are of considerable significance in this study for a number reasons. It is also interesting to note that in a 1924 interview carried out by Daniel Hummel, concerned about the French translation of *Ulysses* Richard Ellmann notes that Joyce himself "had thought . . . the book could not be translated into another language, but might be translated into another medium, that of film."²² In the text of Joyce's *Ulysses*, that he calls a "sketch for reading" Paul Ricoeur sees this sketch as consisting of "holes, lacunae, zones of indetermination, which . . . challenge the reader's capacity to configure what the author seems to take malign delight in defiguring."²³ These zones of indetermination can originate in metonymy and create a sense of intellectual uncertainty if the reader has no

²¹ Whittock, 1990, pp. 25-29.

²² Ellmann, 1982, p. 561.

²³ Ricoeur, 1984, p. 77.

comprehension or sense of knowledge and experience of parts, and I will explore this in the Quays' poetic dialectics. Joyce's distain for the reader, obvious in the text's temporal shifts, narrative ellipses and hallucinatory style, bears comparison with the use of hiatus and non-narrative style that some of the Quay Brothers' films present (this will be examined in detail in Chapters 5, 7 and 8). Implementing approaches used to understand Joyce's texts helps develop analogies towards exegesis of how the Quays transform fragments of literary sources into their films. One of the most enlightening ways of understanding Joyce's experimental narrative, and one that helps us along in understanding how the Quays transform texts spatially, is Joyce's term 'dislocation'. It describes, among other things, Joyce's disruptions of space and time in his texts, and its value as a concept will be apparent in a later discussion of montage of disorientation. In his essay "Dislocation", Fritz Senn describes what may be understood by the neologism:

[dislocation] could be used, after all, for redescribing or (Joyce's cue) "transluding" (FW 419.25) what was provisionally verbalized as metamorphosis, alienated readings, an auto-corrective urge, metastasis, the disrupted pattern principle, or polytropy . . . it might even stand for all those effects that make us respond, spontaneously, with laughter.²⁴

The spontaneous laughter Senn suggests is generated in part by a feeling of not having enough information at hand, in other words, it is the result of an apprehension caused by initial intellectual uncertainty that shifts to a pleasure at having decoded a sense of meaning--or meaningful nonsense--in the passage. He suggests that "[i]t is, of course, the reader who--potentially--executes all the mental shifts."²⁵ The engagement Senn suggests gives credit to the reader's own cocreational ability to work with the text, configuring Ricoeur's zones of indetermination. Using specific montage and camera techniques, the Quays develop a visual dislocation in their interpretation of Schulz's and other texts, a dialectic I expand upon in Chapter 7. These dislocutory instances are a key generator of a feeling of apprehension, as the viewer is forced to engage with something only partially comprehensible and not yet informed by developed mental models or a priori knowledge.

Joyce is unparalleled in his creative and inventive use of palimpsest, portmanteau words and polyglot puns. These three literary techniques can be

²⁴ Senn 1984, p. 211. The reference (FW 419.25) within the quote is to page and line numbers of Joyce's last work, *Finnegan's Wake*.

²⁵ Ibid.

visualised in animation as in no other kind of visual media, and the Quays use similar techniques in their transformative working between text and images (and sound).²⁶ Instead of the graphic lexeme, their palimpsests are a combination of visual tropes, motifs and descriptions from texts that are transmuted into a faint mood and loose narrative of the films, the 'erased' layer of a palimpsest. Poststructuralist literary criticism uses the palimpsest as a model for how writing functions, in that there are always other authors and texts present in writings. In analogy, besides the literary inscriptions, the Quays' use materials that not only signify the puppets themselves, but in the partial erasure of the materials' origins by using metonymic fragments of them, they also reinscribe the meanings contained within the used materials, themselves redolent with significations of past use. The new material that overlays this surface, the images, are composed to a great degree out of references to other artists and movements that the viewer may or may not recognise. Chapter 6 will explore how the puppet and metaphysical machines' composite constructions can also be understood as a kind of palimpsest of Surrealism, Expressionism, Art Brut, Polish graphics and both extant and demolished architecture are reworked and fused together in the objects and spaces of the narrative 'world'.

The aesthetic and literary technique of portmanteau--the combining of two or more words or lexemes to create a new meaning--can also serve as an analogy to help understand why it is possible to understand the Quays' puppets that are often constructed out of fragments. There are many portmanteau words in Ulysses where as Senn suggests, "the language itself becomes an object"²⁷:

'contransmagnificandjewbangtentiality' (3.51) ' pornosophical' (15.109) 'shis' and 'hrim' (15.3103) are portmanteau words that evoke multiple meanings and require a complex exegesis. Like the lexeme fragments of different words, the different meanings implicit in the fragments means the reader must engage in a form of play, to discover the artists or author's intent of meaning in the particular combination of fragments. The technique also resonates with Eisenstein's montage of attractions in the textual collision of semes. Besides Joyce perhaps the most familiar examples of portmanteau are Lewis Carroll's poem 'Jabberwocky,' Kurt Schwitters' sound poems, Hoban's and Arno Schmidt's emulations of Joyce. In such phrases and words, Joyce found a fine balance between nonsense and logic, between semantics and language laws. While Joyce's later works, Ulysses and Finnegan's Wake, are not classified as nonsense literature (indeed, they remain on the most part, unclassifiable as a genre),

²⁶ See Buchan, 1995, for an extended treatment of Joyce's cinematic language.

²⁷ Senn, p. 33. Author translation.

the abundance of neologisms, portmanteau words and palimpsest phrases incite the reader to engage in the author's play between meaning and what can appear, on first reading, nonsense. Two brilliant examples from the Lestrygonians chapter of Joyce's Ulysses (in which the main figure, Leopold Bloom, is thinking about his wife Molly's struggle to understand the word metempsychosis): "Met him pike hoses she called it until I told her about the transmigration (8.112) ²⁸ and later, when peckishly anticipating his lunch: "Ham and his descendants mustered and bred there." (8.742) (The latter (especially when read aloud) is a formidable example of a parodic pun takes the reader on a peripatetic journey interlinking Babylon, Hamlet, cannibalism, Dublin pubs, and a hungry Bloom (it originates in a inner perspective passage of his in the 'Lestrygonians Chapter'). In a literary analogy, like James Joyce's later texts, the Quay Brothers' film texts resist unambiguous classification--they belong to a realm of oneirics, psychotopographic flaneurism and metaphysics. The attraction of Joyce's later works is and remains his absolute mastery of the history of literature which he parodied and pastiched; in the Quays' films, a respect for their sources and an inherent modesty is evident in the beauty of their composite references and selective reassembling of inspirational material. Joyce achieved expression of pre-verbal thought with linguistic inventiveness. The Quays manage to do so with the animation of textures, objects, and revealing the impossible spaces their camera effortlessly traverses, intimating the secret relationships of spastic machinery, extinct architecture, occluded mirrors and fetishised dust.

In The Logic of Sense, Gilles Deleuze discusses different functions of nonsense as exemplified by language use of what he calls the grotesque trinity of madmen, children and poets, and the problems facing the logician:

the problem is a clinical problem, that is, a problem of sliding from one organization to another, or a problem of the formation of a progressive and creative disorganization. It is also a problem of criticism, that is, of the determination of differential levels at which nonsense changes shape, the portmanteau word undergoes a change of nature, and the entire language changes dimension. ²⁹

The world of oneirics, illusion and metaphor as the junction between inner, non-verbalised speech and perception and experience of the external world, in other

²⁸ Joyce, 1986, p. 126.

²⁹ Deleuze, 1990, p. 83.

words, the collision between the vitalist, animism and the phenomenal concrete occupies a privileged position in the Quay Brothers' cinematic address to a literary work. Beginning with Street of Crocodiles, language, poetry and prose became more prominently implicit in the subject matter of their independent works. And these 'worlds' are prominent in the specific cosmogonies of Franz Kafka, Robert Walser and Bruno Schulz. Discussing academics' tendencies towards socio-political readings of these three authors, Jordi Costa suggests that the Quays are

quite indifferent to any possible reading of these referents into their historical context: in the first place they are drawn to the hypnotic glow of their aesthetic context, and finally they sink (and lose themselves) in the inexhaustible cosmology of their subjective, timeless, eternal nightmares.³⁰

While the Quays are not disdainful of their viewers, the 'indifference' Costa suggests results in an aesthetic and narrative puzzle similar to the one Joyce presents his readers.

Vitalist Cosmogonies: Kafka, Walser and Schulz

The authors the Quays (and their critics) mention most are Franz Kafka, Robert Walser and Bruno Schulz. These authors served as an inspiration, not a script or screenplay--and the films based in literature are aesthetically motivated transformations of isolated elements of the texts, themselves more closely aligned with mythopoeia than with dominant ideologies. A philosophical notion that ties Kafka, Walser and Schulz together in terms of the life of the object is a shared expression of vitalism in their writings. The vitalist philosophers, and especially Schopenhauer, posited that human beings are not purely physical but contain some kind of spiritual component or vital essence. The creative act--poesis--is one outlet for expressing this vital essence. Many people are deterred by Schopenhauer's premise that to live means to desire and that this desire is to be avoided, as it leads inevitably to suffering. Yet Schopenhauer offers a solution in asceticism, propounded throughout a variety of his publications, including the fifty 'life rules' compiled in his occasionally joyful, as yet untranslated 50 aphorisms in Die Kunst, Glücklich zu Sein. Dargestellt in fünfzig Lebensregeln (1999) The Art of Being Happy. Presented in Fifty

³⁰ Costa, 2001, p. 45.

Life Rules).³¹ Schopenhauer wavers between being irresistibly drawn to the pleasures of life and to devising methods of avoiding of these pleasures. Paraphrasing his first 'life rule', he believed that that happiness and pleasure are chimera and that it is best to avoid pain and suffering they cause.³² Schopenhauer's philosophy was a major contribution to German Romanticism and had an impact on literary and philosophical sages during and after his time. The three authors the Quays declare as major influences on their aesthetics lived various degrees of Schopenhauer's asceticism, but it is in their writings that, in a turnaround of Schopenhauer's causality, suffering transmutes into desire and the 'pleasure' of writing and creating a 'world' that enables readers to access the enormous sensitivity these authors had to existence and descriptions of fantastic perceptions and metaphysical, vitalist phenomena. The author cannot 'realise' or 'acquire' his or her object, but the creative process of writing encourages epiphanic moments; this is the narrative 'longing' Stewart refers to that generates significant objects and generates and engenders a significant other³³ and these moments can find their way to paper as metaphysical or animistic descriptions of their inner worlds. These moments, I'd suggest, are the ones the Quays sift from the texts and transpose onto the screen, through the media of objects, automata and uncanny architectures, and I will discuss these more fully in later chapters. The Quays: "Our work is so close to us that it isn't work--it's a way of rendering life at its fullest. And in puppetry your hands do a lot of thinking."³⁴ The Quays effect a cinematic permutation of these literary, metaphysical concepts of matter, concepts in these three authors that are informed by vitalism.

Franz Kafka (1883-1924) was one of the first inspirational authors for the Quays: as students in Philadelphia, when they chanced upon his Diaries 1910-23, and Kafka's 'Ein Brüdermord' ('A Fratricide') provided the stimulus for their eponymous short film. In an earlier comment in Chapter 3, the Quays suggested that being twins allowed them "a much greater suspension or desertion of the real world". Although Kafka's development was also the result of a profound alienation as a German-speaking Czech Jew, this comment strongly echoes Kafka's own initial aesthetic and philosophical programme of existentialism and his astonishment at the secretive and terrifying nature of small things. The Quays' conscious desertion of the real world

³¹ Author translation. The book may have been inspired by Baltasar Gracian's Oráculo manual y arte de prudencia (*The Art of Worldly Wisdom*) that Schopenhauer translated into German Gracian's original text as Hand-Orakel und Kunst der Weltklugheit.

³² Schopenhauer, 1999, p. 28.

³³ Stewart, 1993, p. xi.

³⁴ Nichols Goodeve, 1996, p. 85.

may have been more a turn toward a metaphysical and imaginary counterpart that appears more motivated by enchantment than by alienation and fear. McClatchy suggests that reading Kafka changed their thinking about art and that "[i]ntrigued by the quiet intimacies of the artist's private life, they preferred the diary's format--its brief anecdotal entries, the fragment, the interval--to that of novels."³⁵ It was one of the first intimate and fragmentary literary works followed by other authors of a similar genre, whose attention focused on the life and inner world of the artist and its polar opposites of private despair and joyful epiphany.

Kafka's prose is microscopic in its description of everyday events and objects. In André Gide's opinion of Kafka's writing could easily be applied to the Quays' creative transformation of matter:

The realism of his images continually transcend the imagination and I cannot say what I admire more: The "naturalistic" depiction of a fantastic world that becomes credible through the minutious exactness of the images, or the confident bravour of the turn to the secretive.³⁶

Kafka was fascinated by the life of objects, and this explains why he and Schulz are often compared. In his biography of Kafka, Klaus Wagenbach points out that as an author in early 1900s Prague, Kafka stood out against his Prague School's contemporaries Egon Erwin Kisch, Max Brod, Franz Werfel and Rainer Maria Rilke, whose writings are characterised by an unspeakable, swollen style and mystagogical, bloodthirsty and obscene.³⁷ Kafka remained outside these influences and lived his life as an author in an extreme, self-imposed isolation mostly in Prague. His writing is an unparalleled record of the experience of increasing alienation from the surrounding world and its inhabitants, wrought into an expression of an unlived life. This is characterised by his ongoing ambivalence with, and ultimate failure to accept, opportunities to engage in the select community of friends and lovers around him. Yet his writings record these alienations "with the singular instrument of a rigorous fanaticism for truth [and Kafka] attempted to record the results of these and his own situations."³⁸ In the Quay Brothers' works, this fanaticism translates into an exacting sense of formal detail and foregrounding the objects in their films, especially in their use of lingering close-ups and macro lenses. The ontological truth of the materials is

³⁵ McClatchy, 1989, p. 93.

³⁶ Gide, cited in Wagenbach, 1996, p.144. [author translation]

³⁷ Wagenbach, 1996, pp. 50-56. [author translation]

³⁸ Ibid., p. 135 [author translation].

phenomenologically rooted and inescapable, and their animation incites an apprehensive, animistic, almost solipsistic world suggestive of Søren Kierkegaard's thinking that what Kafka wrote was so close to his own. Paraphrased, Kierkegaard describes a deep secretiveness of innocence that is simultaneously fear. The spirit, dreaming, mirrors its own reality but this reality is nothing.³⁹ Another term for this simultaneity of innocence and fear is apprehension.

Perhaps less fearful than Kafka, but nonetheless sharing characteristics with his cosmogony, Robert Walser (1878–1956) was a Swiss writer who wrote prolifically for newspapers and journals and whose novels and short stories inspired a number of the Quays' films (The Comb (From the Museums of Sleep) and Institute Benjamenta). Fragments and themes from Walser's writings are strewn throughout their opus. As second author in the Quay triumvirate Kafka, Schulz and Walser, it is invaluable to consider unique aspects of his writing style and how these three authors writings 'speak' to each other. In an afterword to Institute Benjamenta, the English translation of Walser's Jakob von Gunten and the textual inspiration for the Quay Brothers' Institute Benjamenta, Christopher Middleton comments: "In reality, the book is more like a capriccio for a harp, flute, trombone, and drums."⁴⁰ The musicality of Walser's writing has been repeatedly emphasised, and it is full of musical comparisons and metaphors. Peter Hamm provides some of the most fitting descriptions:

The stars and sun sing, a room possesses a precious tone, a girl's gentleness is like a stream of notes. He compared nights to black sounds, someone enjoys his slowness like a melody or a city affects him like a symphony. In his essays, novels and microgrammes, the compositions and dialogues are reminiscent of musical inspirations, a quality that Walser himself often mentioned.⁴¹

Although his work may be rich in under-, over- and middle tones, "[Walser's] deepest love was for the 'Eintönige', the monotone."⁴² This monotony can be understood in a variety of ways in Walser's writing as a composite and musical word play on mediocrity, daily life, and empty routine. Walser's published complete works were divined in part out of hundreds of pages and fragments of prose, bits of

³⁹ Kierkegaard, cited in Wagenbach, p. 76.

⁴⁰ Middleton, in: Walser, 1995, p. 137.

⁴¹ Hamm, 1996, p. 17.

⁴² Ibid.

dialogue and notes, some written in a tiny handwriting aptly classified as a 'microgramme' in German. Middleton: "This script was not a cipher system, as some scholars have supposed, but a kind of personal shorthand."⁴³ Here is the intersection with the Quays approach to visualisation of Walser's literary music: microscopic views and poetic fragments of what Walser immortalised in his microscript handwriting: the unimportant, self-denial, maps of frustrated desire and longing. In her comparative analysis of H.P. Lovecraft and Schulz, Nelson asks: "What is the difference between a person describing his own madness and a writer obsessed with the notion of containing and controlling madness through art?"⁴⁴ This is a query that also links Walser, Kafka and Schulz. Walser's dream-like fairy tales express an inner turmoil and astonishment at the exquisite and puzzling banalities of an unlived life; committed to a psychiatric institution in 1929, he ceased writing in 1933. Schulz's descriptions of his father's obsessions are interwoven with the magical world of childhood and his father, and Kafka's literary accounts of paranoid behaviour interlink as well. Nelson suggests that "[m]adness is experienced as being enacted on the subject from without".⁴⁵ All three authors the Quays have drawn upon in their works have focused in one way or another on such madness: Walser's Jakob, trapped in the dream world of Institute Benjamenta; Schulz's narratives of his father's increasing withdrawal from the world around him into the life of objects, and Kafka's characters, who, though puzzled, seem to adapt to the contingencies of uncanny, illogical circumstances.

Bruno Schulz is perhaps the author who offered the most inspiration for Quays' own cosmogony. Born in Drohobycz, Poland, in 1892 Schulz was killed there by the Gestapo in 1942. Despite having published relatively few texts, Schulz is described by David Goldfarb as the youngest member of Poland's interwar avant-garde, along with Stanislaw Ignacy Witkiewicz (1885-1939) and prosaist-dramatist Witold Gombrowicz (1904-1969) "who were all deeply invested in an idea like 'childhood.'"⁴⁶ "The Street of Crocodiles" was one of the short prose texts in Schulz's collection Sklepy cynamonowe (Cinnamon Shops) first published in Warsaw in 1934. It has since been republished in different editions and in combination with other texts by the author and translated for better or for worse into a number of languages.⁴⁷ The

⁴³ Middleton, in: Walser, 1983 p. 13.

⁴⁴ Nelson, 2001, p. 107.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 110.

⁴⁶ Goldfarb, 1994.

⁴⁷ Compared to Celina Wieniewska's rather thin English translation of Sklepy cynamonowe into the English The Street of Crocodiles, Josef Hahn's superlative German translation is a beautifully rendered version that expresses Schulz's rich use of description and his lyrical style.

Quays came across Schulz's writings through a Polish acquaintance who introduced him to them as the "Polish Kafka":

Then, naturally, we came to learn that it was not quite the case, that they were two people similar in many respects but also different in others. The first time we read [Schulz] he did not make a particularly striking impression. We found it interesting, but more from a strictly literary standpoint. Subsequently, after a second reading, it managed to make us understand animation as a type of metaphysics.⁴⁸

The Quays' reflections on how the metaphysical content of Schulz's texts had implications for their own form of artistic creativity are elemental to understanding their formal treatment of objects. As a type of metaphysics, the animism I described in Chapter 2 might be a more apt term to describe both Schulz's and the Quay Brothers' conjuring of the world.

It was not only the text that fascinated the Quays. Schulz was a unique autodidactic artist, taught drawing at schools, and a book of his collected drawings, The Booke of Idolatry, was published in 1990 and includes an introduction by Schulz scholar Jerzy Ficowski. This appeared before The Street of Crocodiles, and the imagery suggests what was later to be transposed into his writing. With elements of Francisco de Goya and Georg Grosz, Ficowski suggests that "[a]lready here, in The Booke of Idolatry, there appear mythological affinities--a phenomenon which is inseparably connected with Schulz's work as a writer."⁴⁹ His drawings and writings may have further intensified the Quays' interest in Polish graphic design and its particular qualities. Schulz illustrated his own publications and also worked for other authors, illustrating the first edition of Gombrowicz's major novel Ferdydurke. Ficowski includes a photograph of Stryjska Street in Drohobycz that was the prototype of the Street of Crocodiles in The Cinnamon Shops.⁵⁰ The Quays made trips to Poland--to Krakow, Prague, Łódź, Drohobycz and Wrocław--visual 'field trips' that helped them piece together the fragments of Schulz's text and illustrations.

We had always kept notebooks and 8mm films so we really knew the real textures quite well, so that when we read Schulz finally, it seemed we knew how to approach him . . . A lot of Wrocław absolutely fascinated us--

⁴⁸ Aita, 2001.

⁴⁹ Schulz, 1990, p. 47.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 11.

Krakow, too, a lot of dust and it was all in our notebooks. Wroclaw is this sort of forgotten industrial town, which I suppose is the equivalent of Manchester--or saying you like Pittsburg [laughter]--yes, like Pittsburg, full of dust.⁵¹

In an interesting parallel to the effect the Quays' film had for cinephiles, Bruno Schulz's texts caused something of a whirlwind in literary and academic circles. Recalling the first critics films--other filmmakers, poets, artists--who wrote about the Quay Brothers' early films, there is a further telling parallel. Most of critical response to Schulz was initiated by contemporary authors: David Grossman (See Under: Love), Cynthia Ozick (The Messiah of Stockholm), and Philip Roth (The Prague Orgy), and they also inscribe elements and tropes of Schulz and his texts in their own prose, as do the Quays in their film--in discussions, they occasionally refer to the main puppet in Street of Crocodiles as 'Bruno'. Overall, Goldfarb describes these texts succinctly:

Schulz criticism, by and large, is broad, descriptive, and deals more with ethos and aftertaste than with actual text.⁵² Everyone wants to say something about Schulz, but it is quite difficult to figure out what to say. Schulz's stories are fragmented, elliptical, often without plot or seeming direction, indeed leaving us with more aftertaste than argument. But an aftertaste is not without components, meaning, and causes.⁵³

A similar phenomenon around the Quays developed from the 1990s onwards, when a number of animation films, mostly from students and graduates, began emulating the Quays' use of chiaroscuro, puppet and object construction and uncanny soundscapes.⁵⁴ It was as if the films, especially Street of Crocodiles, touched upon something that led these filmmakers to explore the visual, tactile and aural moods through a wish to understand the original film. Goldfarb's summary of Schulz criticism is reminiscent of Atkinson's 'admission' that "[i]t wouldn't matter if every man, woman or child on earth saw Street of Crocodiles. Only I would truly

⁵¹ Quay Brothers interview, 1992.

⁵² Footnote 10 in Goldfarb's text: Notable exceptions are Teresa and Jerzy Jarzębski, "Uwagi o semantyce przestrzeni i czasu w prozie Brunona Schulza" in *Studia o prozie Brunona Schulza* (Katowice, 1976), 49-73, and Jerzy Jarzębski's introduction to Bruno Schulz, Opowiadania, wybór esejów i listów, ed. Jerzy Jarzębski, 1990.

⁵³ Goldfarb, 1994.

⁵⁴ At the Fantoche Animation festival's preselection in 2003, 14 of the entered films could be described as Quay-derivative.

understand it--which is not to say that I literally understand it at all."⁵⁵ Plumbing the essence of what to say about Schulz's short story and the Quays' film means entering into the worlds--one literary, one cinematic--that these texts evoke and express.

Exile and Alienation

The writings of Schulz, Kafka and Walser are singular records of the experience of increasing alienation from the surrounding world and its inhabitants, wrought into an expression of an unlived life--in their suffering, albeit to different degrees, they are Schopenhauerian to the core. In his writings Schopenhauer also explored how art objectifies the Will and quiets the torment and struggle that are inherent to the Will's nature. The pursuit of this object through writing seems to be the objective of the three authors. They share a fantastic, precise descriptive style that suggests a hypersensitivity and relentless need to understand both the objects and spaces their works contain and the contingency and psychology of their protagonists.

Catastrophe also is a common thread that unites them: Kafka's was his self-imposed increasing isolation from family and surroundings; Walser's was his psychological decline, ending in a sanatorium, and Schultz's was his murder. Schulz's writing and biography is often compared with Kafka (it is conjectured that he translated Kafka's The Trial into Polish with a foreword.⁵⁶), and in this context there are a few relevant points that clarify why these authors hold a particular interest for the Quays. His withdrawal into childhood memories and fantasy may have been a response to the decline of patriarchal order after the dissolution of the Habsburg Empire that resulted in Poland becoming a nation state again and simultaneously swept away by a burgeoning industrial revolution.⁵⁷ Yet this despair is balanced by what I suggested earlier was a turnaround of Schopenhauer's causality of desire and suffering, and it must be said that these authors' had an investment in satisfying a primary desire, or longing, one that Ficowski suggests Schulz turned into the primary focus of his literary art: a "longing for the fullness of childhood [that] is as old as art itself".⁵⁸ In his writings on Herbert Marcuse, Charles Reitz points out that Marcuse's theorises that art can assuage alienation because it has a revitalising, rehumanising force. Reitz then balances this out:

⁵⁵ Atkinson, 1994, p. 36.

⁵⁶ Dutsch, 1992, p. 361.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 349ff.

⁵⁸ Ficowski, 2003, p. 72.

But Marcuse acknowledges that art can also contribute to an alienated existence. Alienation is understood in this second sense as a freely chosen act of withdrawal. It represents a self-conscious bracketing of certain of the practical and theoretical elements of everyday life for the sake of achieving a higher and more valuable philosophical distance and perspective. Marcuse contends that artists and intellectuals (especially) can utilize their own personal estrangement to serve a future emancipation.⁵⁹

This idea of withdrawal and estrangement fits neatly on a number of levels with these three authors. Schulz's mother tongue was Polish yet, like Kafka, he was fluent in spoken and written German and he was also raised in a Jewish family. Schulz and Kafka both remained close to their geographic and cultural origins while distancing themselves from everyday engagement. Walser travelled throughout Europe, was true to his native Switzerland in his texts, yet his writing was not in his native dialect. His writing may reflect what Theodor Adorno describes in the thirteenth aphorism in Minima Moralia, "Protection, help and counsel":

Every intellectual in emigration is, without exception, mutilated, and does well to acknowledge it to himself, if he wishes to avoid being cruelly apprised of it behind the tightly-closed doors of his self-esteem. . . . there is no remedy but steadfast diagnosis of oneself and others, the attempt, through awareness, if not to escape doom, at least to rob it of its dreadful violence, that of blindness."⁶⁰

Schulz's estrangement is not geographical and is more a withdrawal into the magical perception and imagination of childhood, transforming objects and creatures into metaphysical and metaphorical creatures that exist in an imaginary time. He shares with Kafka a sense for the grotesque, and metamorphosis is also found in both writers' works. Unlike Kafka, Schulz was social and had long-term friendships, although his letters indicate he felt lonely, perhaps, again like Kafka, but more playful and less existential, creating an atmosphere in his writing that provided solace from his own alienation. The estrangement and loneliness of these authors incited a fervent engagement with the worlds in their minds.

⁵⁹ Reitz, Charles (undated, unpaginated)

⁶⁰ Adorno, 1974, p. 33.

Although drawn to these authors, the Quays' declared suspension of the real world was hardly inspired by the same motives, and more an opportunity to concentrate on shared aesthetic preferences and sensibilities. It may very well be that there lies a conceptual similarity in the respective 'withdrawals', but for the Quays it offered a fertile and creative nurturing to satisfy a gusto for exploring the many facets and cultures available outside geographic limitations of North America. Gustavo Costantini suggests of the Quays' (and, it seems, of their viewers) that "only by being an 'outsider' can you see Europe the way they see it."⁶¹ This seems a rather naive notion, and it may be a simplification to suggest that only other 'outsiders' will understand the Quays' transformation of the European worlds of Schulz, Walser and Kafka. It is not only cinephiles who are drawn to their works: many other viewers share delight in seeing how these worlds are conjured.

Bruno Schulz's "Ulica Krokodyli"

SB: Do you work with storyboards?

BQ: No. Never. Only at gun point [laughter].⁶²

Street of Crocodiles draws on Schulz's eponymous section in a longer piece of prose writing. Yet besides the title (in English and Polish) and a text in English accompanied by a Polish voice-over at the end of the film, there are no other written or aural textual or linguistic references to the story. Extracting particular literary and aesthetic sources of the 'world' of Schulz's text, this section explores how specific elements in "The Street of Crocodiles" serve as inspiration for the film's visual surface and experimental narrative structure. I lean in part on literature analysis, addressing the text's literary qualities; this is distinct from the queries involving cinematic parameters in the next four chapters. Following the previous discussion of literary techniques and styles, it serves as a linking preamble to these chapters. A passage from "The Street of Crocodiles" introduces the mood for the film's first moments.

On that map, made in the style of baroque panoramas, the area of the Street of Crocodiles shone with the empty whiteness that usually marks polar regions or unexplored countries of which almost nothing is known. The lines of only a few streets were marked in black and their names given

⁶¹ Costantini, 2007.

⁶² Quay Brothers interview, 1996.

in simple, unadorned lettering, different from the noble script of the other captions. The cartographer must have been loath to include that district in the city and his reservations found expression in the typographical treatment.⁶³

Schulz's descriptions take us from the surface of a baroque map to imaginary uncharted expanses, unmarked city areas and into the mind of a disdainful cartographer. Perhaps the most powerful image he incites is that of how the cartographer's attitude towards a part of town translates into its spare, graphic representation, a white blot, a gap that stains the map like a black hole. This metaphor--the empty whiteness that stands in for a part of the city that is compared to unknown polar regions--finds its way into the opening sequence of Street of Crocodiles. We hear the steady, rhythmic sound of a clock ticking. In closeup, an ornate magnifying apparatus rests on top of a black and white section of a map, its grids and curves indistinct, blended out by bright light. A gnarled hand enters the frame and flips the lens to focus on a small section of the map. The starkly illustrated black lines become thicker and distorted at the lens's curved edges. The ticking continues through the transition fade to black. A hard cut confronts us with a poster of a stylised head on a wall. A door opens inwards and a man enters from frame left. As the clock keeps ticking, pale blue titles "Prologue: The Wooden Esophagus" are superimposed on the black and white live-action setting. The man stands in the doorway at the left of a proscenium stage with rows of chairs in front of it. He counts lights on the ceiling. A dreamy, slow whistling begins and the man walks across the room onto the stage. He approaches a wooden construction on the stage, spits into it, and sets an animated realm in motion, a labyrinth of pulleys, wires and creatures constructed out of the fabrics of refuse, of metal, crumbling cloth and faded organic materials.

While this sequence is brimming with other references to Schultz's story, it serves as an example of how elements of the text can find their way into the film. Wollen's description of the auteur's reworking of written texts foregrounds the process of how texts can make the transition to screen:

Incidents and episodes in the original screenplay or novel can act as catalysts; they are the agents which are introduced into the mind (conscious or unconscious) of the auteur and react there with the motifs

⁶³ Schulz, 1977, p. 100.

and themes characteristic of his work. The director does not subordinate himself to another author; his source is only a pretext, which provides catalysts, scenes, which fuse with his own preoccupations to produce a radically new work.⁶⁴

Many of Schulz's textual elements acted as catalysts that merged with many of the Quays' own concepts about space, time, textures, music and narrative. In our example, a metaphor for an area of a city becomes a psychotopographic link, an entry point into the Quay's version, the animated world that is accessed via the Wooden Esophagus. In this realm, a graceful puppet is freed by a scissors snip to tumble into a stage-like room. Triggered by his finger touching a cord that uncannily disentangles itself, a screen rises, opening access to a fantastic realm, Bruno Schulz's *Street of Crocodiles*, in which laws of nature seem to have been forgotten and the environment is pervaded with a seemingly eternal layer of velvet dust.

As diverse as these two artistic modes are, there is a set of stylistic features and devices they share. In her brilliant comparative analysis of Schulz, H. P. Lovecraft and Daniel Paul Schreber, Nelson describes the psychotopographic imagination that she attributes to:

interior psychic regions as we find them projected onto an outer landscape. A psychotopographer is the artist who devotes herself to describing--with varying degrees of awareness about the true nature of the subject--the images of these inner regions as she discovers them in an imagined exterior landscape.⁶⁵

Schulz's descriptions of the inner regions and his father's delirious withdrawal into madness express themselves through a hermetic psychotopography of the world within the walls of his family home that extends to descriptions of the *Street of Crocodiles* and the cosmos. In *Street of Crocodiles*, interspersed with vignettes of metaphorical machines and a sub-plot involving a child who has discovered his mirror can transport a beam of light that vivifies objects, the puppet wanders through the decrepit alleys, surreptitiously appearing out of shops, concealing objects in a diagonally striped box (an obvious nod to Buñuel) and gazing voyeuristically into peep holes and endless deep spaces.

⁶⁴ Wollen, 1969, p. 113.

⁶⁵ Nelson, 2001, p. 110-111.

Schultz's is a world of imagination, myth, lost childhood regained, a world in which lowly creatures and matter gain a mythopoetical status. His text is redolent with the epiphanies of madness, demiurges, erotic undertones, automata and the secret life of objects. In the film, lost in a labyrinth of glass and reflection, the puppet responds to the subtly homoerotic beckoning gesture of a tailor into his shop (a passage in Schulz's text); with a conductor's gesture using an 'oversized' sewing needle, the tailor sets in motion three assistants, trim, bustling shop assistants whose lower half is composed of drawers set in elaborate wooden construction suggestive of Dali's female 'Anthropomorphic Cabinet'. Fragile, delicate and unsettling, their hollow skulls are lit with a demonic inner light. The puppet's seduction in progress, the tailor busies himself with a map of Poland, lined with yellow sutures, and proceeds to fit a new suit for a bloody slab of liver that he conjures with his hands to appear atop the map. Simultaneously, the puppet, attended to by the tailor's shop girls, receives a new head resembling theirs, and decorative cloth is wrapped around his shoulders. The tailor watches from the side, sensuously stroking the puppet's head that he cradles in his arms as he observes the scene. We return to the puppet, again with his original head, who is accompanied to the 'back room' resplendent with anatomical drawings and objects and actions which could be a visual guide through Kraft-Ebing.

Susan Stewart suggests 'domains' that would seem to suit these inhabitants of Schulz's cosmogony:

If authority is invested in domains such as the marketplace, the university, or the state, it is necessary that exaggeration, fantasy, and fictiveness in general be socially placed within the domains of anti- and nonauthority: the feminine, the childish, the mad, and the senile, for instance. In formulating the loci of authority and exaggeration in this way, we necessarily and nostalgically must partake in the lost paradise of the body and the myths of the margin, the outside.⁶⁶

The Quays' transformation of Schulz's descriptions give them a concrete domain with dimensions, perspective and texture, and these domains recall Deleuze's grotesque trinity of "madmen, children and poets"⁶⁷ specific to nonsense language and Benjamin's description of the fairy tale as a 'waste product'. They provide us

⁶⁶ Stewart, 1993, p. xiii.

⁶⁷ Deleuze, 1990, p. 83

with a cinematic psychotopographic space populated by automata, metaphysical machines and puppets that, in staying true to the textual inspiration, can lead us to unending passageways and paradoxical discrepancies in spatial coherence. Goldfarb refers to Polish critic Jerzy Jarzebski, who "brilliantly reads the Schulzian chronotope as the fusion of "dream time" or mythic time with labyrinth space⁶⁸.

After the long sequence in the tailor's shop, via a disorienting travelling shot the puppet is suddenly out of the realm and back in the space where we first saw him, back in front of the stage, his finger releasing the cord, now moving in reverse which re-forms its tangle. The music which has structured an accompanied the visual images throughout the film, fades, and murmuring voices and sounds rise. What appears to have been a visual journey into the puppets unconscious is unsettled by the disconcerting fact that his neck is still draped with the colourful cloth he received in the tailor's shop. The sound fades to silence and the colour leaches to almost monochrome. In the final shot, a text (in English) from Bruno Schulz's 'Street of Crocodiles' is superimposed on the final image. A voice-over in Polish reads the text, falteringly repeating the last line three times: 'Obviously, were were not able to afford anything better.' The puppet is again trapped and frozen in the limbo from which it had been freed.

Part of the popularity of the Quay Brothers' film comes from its successful visual transformation of a text-based inner, 'envisioned world' into a 'visible world'. Street of Crocodile's vitalism and animistic urge is apparent not only in the transformation of inanimate materials into 'living' ones, but also in a purification and condensation of the 'catalyst' of Schulz's text and references into a cinematic expression of visual metaphor, rich tropes and polysemy. Referring to Bachelard, Nelson describes the house as "perhaps the most familiar of all psychotopographic loci."⁶⁹ The cloistered interiors of the Quays' film bring to life the reclusive, psychological time-space of Schulz's 'world', uniting the sealed-off room of "Tailors' Dummies"--the film's philosophical and metaphysical source--with the "polar regions or unexplored countries of which almost nothing is known."⁷⁰

Cycles and recycling play important roles in Schulz's work, since they combine to form a central theme of his text, formally and in content. In the cinematic 'rewriting' of 'The Street of Crocodiles' traces of Drohobycz's cinnamon shops--archaeological layers of dust, deserted street corners, a malingering boy, objects

⁶⁸ Footnote 24 in Goldfarb: "Opowiadanie...", LIII-LVII refers to Jerzy Jarzebski's introduction to Bruno Schulz, Opowiadania, wybór esejów i listów, ed. Jerzy Jarzebski, 1990.

⁶⁹ Nelson, 2001, p. 112.

⁷⁰ Schulz, 1977, p. 100.

constructed of the collective detritus that Schulz so brilliantly describes, louche seamstresses--are strewn as haptic reminders of a world lost and of the world described by the Father in the three treatises of "Tailors' Dummies". Goldfarb:

This piecing together of fragments of different mythologies is a standard mode of Schulzian myth making. The mythic origins of the elements are real. They have a textual history. Their combination, however, is "illogical". They could make sense only in the ephemeral logic of dreams or in the disjointed reasoning of a child's mind, concatenating arbitrary relations as causal links.⁷¹

The Quays also piece together fragments, using objects from the world around us that do not necessarily derive from life and immediate reality, but they have a textural, material and cultural history. I have stated that notions of language, structure and perception that define the animated image and the special case of puppet animation are crucial to develop critical contexts to describe it. The language of dream may be difficult to enunciate cinematically, but it does have a position in our experience. Jarvie's remarks on the differences and overlaps between fictional worlds and reality underpins this:

Stories, day-dreams, dreams, drama vary considerably in the degree to which they contrast with reality; that they exist, that we have them, makes them part of the real world. Yet they have this special proto-filmic quality of being worlds nestled within the real world and hence useable to highlight its features, mark its differences.⁷²

The proto-filmic quality is similar to Goldfarb's reading of Schulz's stories. Reflecting on relationships between pre-verbal thought, oneirics and spectatorship can contribute to understanding the pleasure involved in watching the Quay Brothers' film and of critics' and spectators' engagement to articulate the impressions the film evokes. Street of Crocodiles' meandering plot is underscored even more by its foregrounding of style and its transformations of Schulz's internal logic into film--an il-logic of dream texts frequently found in late impressionistic descriptive prose. Questioned about the status of the text in the film's development they said: "We

⁷¹ Goldfarb, 1994.

⁷² Jarvie, 1987, p. 55.

never think about it, always, it's the way it works on the retina. We wouldn't bind ourselves to a text. At the very end of [Street of Crocodiles] there is a text, but it is an apology--it was Schulz's text."⁷³ Schulz's text is also Schulz's narrative literary formulation of a world.

Schulz's own words on the urge to address the reworking of myth are illuminating:

Poetry happens when short-circuits of sense occur between words, a sudden regeneration of the primeval myths. Not one scrap of an idea of ours does not originate in myth, isn't transformed, mutilated, denatured mythology. The most fundamental function of the spirit is inventing fables, creating tales. [T]he building materials [that the search for human knowledge] uses were used once before; they come from forgotten, fragmented tales or "histories." Poetry recognizes these lost meanings, restores words to their places, connects them by the old semantics.⁷⁴

The Quays' creation of tales use physical 'building material' that have often been 'used once before' and 'come from forgotten, fragmented tales or "'histories"'. Like Benjamin's detritus brought together "in a new volatile relationship"⁷⁵, they are sifted from histories of art, gathered during second-hand shop forages, materials frayed by age, alienated from their original purposes and reconfigured to make new meanings. Their collaged book cover for their own copy of Schulz's book is also a collage of fragments. They invest a poetry in their objects, indeed, they "demand that the decors act as poetic vessels and be foregrounded as much as the puppets themselves."⁷⁶ Goldfarb describes an analogous rummaging, both in terms of the original creative act (the Quays' film and Schulz's text) and in terms of how those who emulate them draw on what the artists distil from the plethora of imagery they gather:

A good Polish flea market today is probably only a sparser version of what it was one hundred years ago--a bricolage of old swords, coins, knives, stamps, machine parts, books, embroidery, eyeglasses, fountain pens, menorahs, handmade lace, china, microscopes, cameras, war

⁷³ Quay Brothers interview, 1992.

⁷⁴ Schulz, in Ficowski, 1990, pp 115-16.

⁷⁵ Benjamin, 1999, pp. 16-17.

⁷⁶ Quay Brothers, 1986, p. 1.

medals, carved saints, beaded caftans, military hats, wedding dresses, caged birds, farm implements, postcards, tooled metal reproductions of the Black Madonna of Czestochowa, wooden shoes, fresh eggs, photographs, pocket watches, hand tools, drafting compasses, musical instruments, and fermented grain juice in old vodka bottles for the preparation of a sour soup called "zurek". Each of these things belongs to a rich semiotic system known to the initiates who buy and sell them. Those who write about Schulz are left to rummage through this exquisite garbage heap of symbols."⁷⁷

This description of a Polish flea market describes not only the objects Schulz invokes in his stories. It could also be a props shopping list for Street of Crocodiles, and viewers intimate with the origins of the Quays' materials have access to the films' own semiotic system. But it is not simply the materials they collect and how they arrange them in the mise-en-scène. In their use of lighting, lenses and camera, the Quays pay infinitely precise attention to the simplest things--a screw, a dandelion clock, a mottled piece of glass is transformed into a poetic epiphany. They explain how this is inspired by Schulz's writing: "We want animation to be like a mark on the margins, a grand apocryphal, in the same sense as Bruno Schulz's work. It is a defiance we picked up thanks to his work, which has pushed us to create something of which we are quite proud."⁷⁸ Interpreted by the Quays, the marginal and the uneventful are transported into the realms of visual poetry. Goldfarb highlights a similar process in Schulz's writing:

Though the overall effect of Schulz's stories is fantastic, the specific details he uses tend to be scrupulously realistic descriptions of everyday life. When Schulz describes the angle of light on a particular street at a specific time on a certain day of the year, we can be fairly sure it is like that. This is the area where Schulz's architect's precision appears. It would be a cheaply gothic effect to heighten the fantastic quality of the story with words like "freakish." As such it would weaken Schulz's technique of raising the everyday, or . . . "flea-market reality," to the level of epic.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Schulz's "Treatise on Tailors' Dummies: Conclusion", p. 67, in: Goldfarb, 1994.

⁷⁸ Aita, 2001.

⁷⁹ Goldfarb, 1994.

The Quays' precision rests in lingering on small gestures until they take on a new meaning. Instead of the fleeting glimpse of an object, the camera often rests on a shop window display, a pane of glass a layer of dust, that, because of the attention the camera gives it, becomes singular and endowed with a mythical attribute. The Quays: "For us, [Bruno Schulz] is one of those rare writers who demand a very deep private shade, not public sunlight. His writing is a prose texture extremely dense, thick and poetic."⁸⁰ They take on Schulz's cue in the lighting and decors, and the architectural labyrinth of the film leans heavily on the text's descriptions.

The 'Generatio Aequivoca'

One of the most astonishing passages in The Street of Crocodiles collection is Schulz's "Tailors' Dummies" that contains three subsections.⁸¹ It seethes with concepts that come very close to definitions of animism and of vitalism. Nelson suggests it is in his Cinnamon Shops that Schulz presents "his main metaphysical proposition, which is deeply Platonic; that what we mistake for objective reality--that is, the empirical world of the senses--is always trembling on the point of disintegration."⁸² Crucial to understanding why the Quay Brothers' film manages to express in images what Schulz's proposition entails is that the mistake Nelson articulates can incite a sense of apprehension, and it is this apprehension that the Quays have managed to so skilfully to create in their animated imagery: a haptic world of the senses that is crumbling, that does fall apart and disintegrate, but because this objective reality, the profilmic matter, objects and stuff, is animated, it does not cease to be in the world as objects..

Schultz himself helps to illuminate this, as he describes a young boy listening to his increasingly demented father speak. He is sitting in a sewing atelier with two seamstresses, the lamps smoking and the sewing machines running, unattended, because the women are still, transfixed:

"The Demiurge," said my father, "has had no monopoly of creation, for creation is the privilege of all spirits. Matter has been given infinite fertility, inexhaustible vitality, and, at the same time, a seductive power of temptation which invites us to create as well. In the depth of matter,

⁸⁰ Quay Brothers interview with Jo Jürgens (undated).

⁸¹ "Treatise on Tailors' Dummies or the Second Book of Genesis"; "Treatise on Tailors' Dummies: Continuation", and "Treatise on Tailors' Dummies: Conclusion", in Schulz, 1977, pp 51-71.

⁸² Nelson, 2001, p. 71.

indistinct smiles are shaped, tensions build up, attempts at form appear. The whole of matter pulsates with infinite possibilities that send dull shivers through it. Waiting for the life-giving breath of the spirit, it is endlessly in motion. It entices us with a thousand sweet, soft, round shapes which it blindly dreams up within itself.

"Deprived of all initiative, indulgently acquiescent, pliable like a woman, submissive to every impulse, it is a territory outside any law, open to all kinds of charlatans and dilettanti, a domain of abuses and of dubious demiurgical manipulations. Matter is the most passive and most defenseless essence in cosmos. Anyone can mould it and shape it; it obeys everybody. All attempts at organizing matter are transient and temporary, easy to reverse and to dissolve. There is no evil in reducing life to other and newer forms. Homicide is not a sin. It is sometimes a necessary violence on resistant and ossified forms of existence which have ceased to be amusing. In the interest of an important and fascinating experiment, it can even become meritorious. Here is the starting point of a new apologia for sadism."

My father never tired of glorifying this extraordinary element--matter.⁸³

The passage describes not only Schulz's particular understanding of the life of objects. It also suggests the effective and animistic transubstantiation that dead matter undergoes when it is animated. Referring to Street of Crocodiles, the Quays remark that they "grounded the film around [Schulz's] very specific treatment of matter, certain metaphysical notions of "degraded life" (as found in "Treatises on Tailors' Dummies"), and his mythopoetic ascension of the everyday."⁸⁴ Schulz suggests that matter has a vitality in and of itself.

The Conclusion of his "Treatise on Tailors' Dummies, or The Second Book of Genesis" includes a description of a "generatio equivoca" that is an inspirational concept for the Quays and central trope for the present context: "a species of beings only half organic, a kind of psuedofauna and pseudoflora, the result of a fantastic fermentation of matter."⁸⁵ This text had substantial impact on the Quays' aesthetic and cinematic understanding of objects, and they refer to it in a 1986 text they released the same year Street of Crocodiles was made: "We were naturally drawn by his sense of the marvellous, the fabulous, his 'apocryphal thirteenth month', his, as he

⁸³ Schulz, 1977, p. 59.

⁸⁴ Quay Brothers, 1986, p. 1.

⁸⁵ Schulz, 1977, p. 66.

called it 'generatio aequivoca'.⁸⁶ The vitalist concepts implicit in Schulz's extended description of the generatio aequivoca, creatures that were "mobile, sensitive to stimuli and yet outside the pale of real life" of which "chemical analysis revealed in them traces neither of albumen nor of carbon compounds"⁸⁷ are pivotal to understanding how and why the Quays' puppets take on certain attributes and appearances. If we take the term literally, in Latin generatio aequivoca translates as self-reproduction, and is known as a form of Aristotelian abiogenesis, that reflected on the possibility of spontaneous generation of living organisms from dead or inorganic matter.

In an essay offering an expanded reading of Schulz's particular cosmogony, Mikal Oklot attributes Jerzy Jarzebski with suggesting: "Generatio aequivoca, a term denoting self-reproduction, comes to Schulz most likely from Schopenhauer, whose thought was critical in shaping the imagination of Russian and Polish writers.⁸⁸ Citing The World as Will and Representation, Oklot suggests Schopenhauer regarded generatio aequivoca as "infinite eagerness, ease, and exuberance with which the will-to-live presses impetuously into existence..."⁸⁹. In the remainder of this sentence, from Chapter XXVIII entitled 'Characterisation of the Will-To-Live', Schopenhauer continues: "

...under millions of forms everywhere and at every moment by means of fertilization and germs, and indeed, where these are lacking, by means of generatio aequivoca, seizing every opportunity, greedily grasping for itself every material capable of life; and then again, lest us cast a glance at its awful alarm and wild rebellion, when in any individual phenomenon it is to pass out of existence, especially where this occurs with distinct consciousness.⁹⁰

The engrossing vitalism inherent in this description of matter, of all matter, also without biological process as 'grasping for itself every material capable of life' is remarkably resonant with Schulz's own description of the 'fantastic fermentation of matter' he attributes to the generatio aequivoca in his writing, and to the 'infinite fertility, inexhaustible vitality' the father attributes to matter in the passage above.

⁸⁶ Quay Brothers, 1986, p. 1.

⁸⁷ Schulz, 1977, p. 66.

⁸⁸ Oklot, Michal, 2007. (34) Noted by Jerzy Jarzebski. Cf. Bruno Schulz, Opowiadania, xxx.

⁸⁹ Schopenhauer, 1966, p. 350.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

Ficowski suggests that Schulz had a theoretical view that "the limitations of human knowledge, our epistemological helplessness, decreases the distance between the power of knowledge and art."⁹¹ In the Quays' films, this helplessness is transformed by reification of the concept into a haplessness of matter, in the non-anthropomorphic puppets and machines that propose epistemological puzzles to the viewer. The chapter that includes Schopenhauer's citation above begins thus: "Our second book ends with the question as to the aim and purpose of this will [will-to-live] that has proved to be the inner nature of all things in the world."⁹² He then offers an alternate conceptual framework that is remarkably useful as an analogy to describing the experience of animation film, especially as he avoids the often (and over-)used notion of the anima, the soul, as being what animation can effect in inanimate objects. One of the most striking features of the Quays' puppets is that, in distinction to most anthropomorphized puppets, they do not perform a soul. Indeed, what is remarkable in many of them is that they lack individual character, often going through motions that don't necessarily imply that their 'being' in the world is of any consequence. They exhibit rather a version of the vitalist, animistic will-to-live, the generatio aequivoca in the realm particular to a film.

Goldfarb suggests an approach to Schulz's texts--one that, if one thinks of cinema as a 'dream screen'--may also explain why this text can be interpreted cinematically:

The logic of these "strange" stories becomes clearer if they are read like dreams. . . . everyone is a "real-world expert," and few people are "dream-world experts"; hence, dreams are difficult to explain. They have an internal logic and make sense while they are happening, but seem to fall apart when we try to explain them on the basis of their plots.⁹³

Street of Crocodiles presents a 'problem' similar to Schulz's prose--in part because the film's images and objects are based on the short story's metaphysical 'events' and character's experiences. Puppet animation provides a suitable stylistic palette for visualising these literary techniques, metaphors and animistic resonances that are indelibly and imaginatively linked to the objective, phenomenal reality Nelson refers to earlier in what she termed Schultz's main metaphysical proposition. A fragment of cloth, a bit of metal, a dried broccoli branch is transubstantiated into its vitalist,

⁹¹ Ficowski, 2003, p. 76.

⁹² Schopenhauer, 1966, p. 349.

⁹³ Goldfarb, 1994.

animated counterpart. The polysemy Schulz's text presents is transformed cinematically into hyperimagery, using the basic animation device of single-frame shooting. During projection, these frames can express a compression and condensation equalling that of Schulz's creative play. The Quays make use of a defining feature of animation: absolute control over the single frame and the resulting flow of images which present that which does not exist in the physical world as 'alive', i.e. the animistic 'bringing to life' of objects.

Returning to Schulz's text, and bearing in mind the concepts explored above, Goldfarb singles out a quality of Schulz's writing that, in the Quays' reworking of the text, is similar to what confronts their viewers:

The meaning of such texts becomes a function of their intertextuality--their place among other texts. The failure of critics to recognize the interpretive demand of these works partially explains the scarcity of interpretive criticism on Schulz. This reconstructive activity is precisely what so many avoid when they stress that Schulz created "his own" strange mythology out of sheer genius. In fact, Schulz's prose is a confluence of mythic streams that could not be renarrativized as a straightforward allegory. Without specific textual criticism, Schulz's prose suffers the catastrophe of "those blind birds made of paper." The reader is left to search the skies and reassemble the flock.⁹⁴

This echoes Deleuze's proposal that any work in a field is itself imbricated within other fields and underscores how comparative exploration other fields of creative activity can be useful. Schulz's text is often considered in proximities to Kafka and Walser, and the Quay Brothers' film locates the text in a tradition of cinematic image making. Some of the Quays' artistically sensitive critics have already undertaken a reconstructive activity in their writings. The next chapters will piece together how the Quays transform the "blind birds made of paper" into one of the most intertextual and seminal films in animation and cinema history.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

Chapter 5. Traversing the Esophagus

A closer look into recesses and corners of the Quays' studio beyond the glass cases and bookshelves reveals how they are brimming with the tools of their trade. Compasses, screwdrivers, files, bits and pieces of old metals, puppet armature parts, filigree wires and pulleys are meticulously arranged in cupboards, shelves and drawers attest to the artisanal skills their films require. The Quay Brothers tap into a vast range of inspirational sources in their filmmaking process. Much has been written about the 'alchemy' of their films, yet the process of how they achieve this alchemy has more in common with a respectful and deeply curious attitude to the commonplace, the forgotten, the arcane, the--on first glance--banal, than with a methodological or systemised searching for materials appropriate to any one film.

Their research and studio process is more often than not rooted in an utterly tactile sensibility and in their notion of 'the liberation of the mistake'. An example is the origin for the architectural wonder of Lisa Benjamenta's subterranean realm in Institute Benjamenta that emerged from an interest in anonymous architectures and a strong fascination for Hans Poelzig and the entire realm of the Baroque--in particular the German Asam brothers and the Zimmermann brothers. Holding a postcard of the St. Johann-Nepomuk church, also known as the Asamkirche (Asam Church) built in the mid 18th century by Rococo architect and sculptor Egid Quirin Asam and his brother Cosmas Damian in Munich, they turned it upside down. What was an ornate, skyward-reaching ceiling vault transformed into a deep, concave space, walls lined with architectural oddities, paintings, plaster decoration and other religious artifacts, the floor now a ceiling. This ornate grotto inspired the interior space and ethereal, liquid mood of Lisa Benjamenta's refuge. The kind of research the Quays undertake respects existing creative origins and identifying features while reinventing them in sets and visual compositions that result in their unmistakable cinematic style. The Quays regard themselves as 'authentic trappers', be that in the gentle rummaging at a marché aux puces in the boxes of detritus hidden beneath vendor's tables; not finding a sought-for book in a library, then discovering on the same shelf another volume secreting an unexpected wealth of images, diagrams and ideas. In countries they have travelled to around the world, the archive, the used book seller, the antique shop, the archive, the library, each with their own idiosyncratic ordering and disordering, are the secretive and astonishing sources of

ideas, materials, sounds, music and figures that find their way into the Quay Brothers' over 30 films to date.

Distinct from the 'mythic' origins of their preferred author's descriptions of matter, the objects, architecture and other elements in the Quays' mise-en-scène have physical, tangible origins. They provide historical references; objets trouvés, faded fabrics showing the effects of age and wear, Duchamp-esque 'readymades' and bachelor machines--all are suggestive of the eras in which their literary sources set their tales. An example of this is Schulz's combing of history that is mirrored by the Quays' excursions into the locations of these mythologies to gather the stuff, the forgotten materials from attics and museums, in immersions in the emotional capacity of music, or in the 8mm films they shot on their travels, and in the photographs, postcards and old prints that once were contemporary to these authors and later function as silent witnesses to the atmosphere of many of their works. Street of Crocodiles gathers and reassembles fragments of materials from this lost history, transporting Schulz's literary descriptions into the locations that are the sets of the film.

Mapping the architecture, spaces and objects that are the labyrinth of the Quay Brothers' films, and of Street of Crocodiles in particular means investigating how the architectural constructions and materials create the spatialities particular to the film's 'world'. Critics have described Street of Crocodiles as labyrinthine. I will interpret this in four ways: firstly, because it takes cues from Schulz's metaphysical descriptions of space and time for its cinematic images (outlined in the previous chapter); secondly, as a collaged, convoluted and disconnected space littered with puppets and objects, third, I show how discrepancies of scale and miniatures contribute to the credibility of the realm and finally, I suggest it becomes labyrinthine in the concrete sense of negotiating a montaged spatial uncertainty. I then propose how the combination of these can incite an animated architectural uncanny.

Labyrinthine Space

While the analysis of Schultz's text concentrated on stylistic features that resonate between the film and Schulz's writing, a further element that contributes to manipulations of space such as are found in Schulz's writings is one of time. Street of Crocodiles meandering narrative takes us through a labyrinth of spaces that disregard causality or continuity. Ficowski suggests that

Schulzian time . . . inventively departs from conventional conceptions. Past time returns and exists in the present, elements of dream coexist with reality and possess its same density in a fluid, changing chronology. Disparate elements of dream and consciousness weave a reality existing in an expanded time subject to man.¹

In the film, shifts in time translate into spatial movement. The past often resurfaces in the form of a space's revisitation, as in the two sequences, one a few minutes after the exposition and the second at end of the film, that formally bracket the puppet's excursion into the mythic timespace of the film's zones, shops and corridors. As the puppet touches a tangled string, it unravels; at the end of the film, back in the same space, it entangles itself again, a closure of sorts, tying up time's flow as the film's colour bleaches to a mythopoetic monochrome. Goldfarb summarises of Schulz's literary methods that suggest a number of affinities with the Quays' visual style:

Not only is Schulz's writing like a labyrinthine structure, but a labyrinthine map of the city is like a text from the fragmented memory of childhood--a text that is labyrinthine in all dimensions (externally in its graphic appearance, internally in its logic, continuously on the dimension of interpretation proceeding from external to internal, then recursively as we negotiate among nested interpretations somehow inside and outside the text, as we create our own interpretations).²

Goldfarb's analogy of the labyrinthine text as a fragmented memory of a map of a city is also a surprisingly accurate analogy for 'reading' Street of Crocodiles--and the film suggestively begins with a shot of a map. The puzzle is intensified once we slip through the 'Wooden Esophagus', the passageway between the live action (black and white) and the animated (colour) realms, and, like Lewis Carroll's Alice falling down the hole, we enter the Quays' spatial and architectonic interpretation of Schulz's labyrinth.

This movement between realms translates into the Quay Brothers' film with attention to spatial and narrative transitions, for instance in the opening 'Theatre Stage' and 'Wooden Esophagus' sequences. In closeup, a small mechanical lens apparatus is perched on a densely drawn black and white map. A hand enters the

¹ Ficowski, 2003, p. 84.

² Goldfarb, 1994.

frame and flips the lens down, magnifying a section of the stark graphic map detail that fills the frame. The camera pulls back to an old man who studies the map, then haltingly makes his way through an empty theatre, doing pre-performance checks. He counts the spotlights and walks up the short flight of stairs, stage left, to the proscenium, moves a lamp on the stage, music begins and he exits to the right of the stage. Up to this point in the film, the live-action images are black and white, and spatial arrangements are conceptually clear as the camera follows the man and his movements through the room.

This spatial coherence is disrupted by a hard cut that presents a composition of objects also in monochrome, four close-up 'still life' shots of a mesh form, a pulley, scissors and a bowl of screws shot with macro lenses separated by tracking transitions (two vertical, one diagonal). Unintroduced, not diegetically connected, the viewer is at a loss as to where these objects and spaces are relative to the previous shot. We then return to the live-action setting and the man enters the frame from the left, moves across the stage to a wooden prop resembling a pulpit or speaker's podium and looks through the eyepiece at the top of it. Pale blue titles with the words 'Prelude: The Wooden Esophagus' are superimposed over the scene. A cut is followed by a vertical pan into a colour space with sectioned wood planes and metal apparati. Back to the actor who, in medium closeup, pauses then labouring his tongue in his cheeks and mouth, coaxes forth a gob of spit. It drops from his wet, puckered lips and falls into the Wooden Esophagus. On a hard cut an animated simulacrum of the spit reappears, descending into the coloured realm, this time shot to show more of the space and objects within. The moment it lands on a bloodied razor blade apparatus, this begins to churn, the spit setting the realm itself in motion. Interspersed with transitions, the camera pans down through levels of now animated metal objects including pulleys and a sewing machine-like apparatus shot in similar lighting and macro lens effects as the earlier shot of black and white objects.

A thin, moving string is guided, trailed, tangled in and through these machines and the camera comes to rest on a puppet whose arm is fixed at the wrist in a streetlamp, trapped by the same string that courses through the machines. The viewer's comprehension of the spatial labyrinth of these three distinct spaces--the live action realm, the hermetic machines' space and the puppet's surroundings--becomes clearer as we return to the live action realm, where the old man's hand, in close-up, grasps a pair of scissors on the outside of the 'Wooden Esophagus'. Inside, the puppet pulls at the wire. The man's hand makes a cutting gesture and the camera cuts back to the puppet's realm and a close up of its arm as scissor tips move in and

snip the string. Pulleys spin out of control, the puppet's arm is cut loose and it staggers as it is set free into the realm. These disconnected spaces are connected by the string that courses through all three of them and it provides the connection that offers clues to entangle the spatial labyrinth.

Spatial Collage

Film architecture (or what is generally understood as set design) represents a fictional space and is not completely bound to physical laws, such as gravity or weight bearing limitations. This puts it in a privileged position in relation to the 'lived-in' spaces of built architecture. Juan Antonio Ramirez assigns the properties of cinematic set design to the following categories: it is illusory, fragmentary, flexible and moveable, it is non-orthogonal, demonstrates distorted size and proportions; is quickly built and usually quickly dismantled or destroyed.³ The same conditions apply to the Quays' puppet sets: the actions and movement of the puppets take place within an existing space that presents spatial dimensions and perspectival depth. Set design in puppet animation has a lesser degree of controllability than other techniques of animation because although a film is shot frame-by-frame using stop-motion, the images are produced in front of the camera using a *mise-en-scène* similar to live-action studio productions. In *Street of Crocodiles*, the main formal parameters are texture (materials), spatial constructions (zones) and scale (miniatures). Yet puppet animation can subvert and expand upon Ramirez' definitions of live-action set design, since the artificiality inherent in film architecture is exaggerated in puppet animation and it does not have to exhibit an architectural logic. Analogous in some respects to live action, puppet set design can be tailored to create illogical architecture and highly artificial spaces. Keeping scale, camera angles and lenses in mind, like live-action filmmakers, the Quays can 'cheat' on architectural requirements, distort perspective and, since they are building miniature sets, they can use materials that would otherwise not be feasible in a 1:1 scale set. Planning a specific scene often requires combining architectonic fragments that do not have structural coherence, often to enable ease of camera movement.

The Quays' sets are constructed out of a variety of materials, including mirrors, posters, fabrics, glass, wood and metal. Characteristic is a preference for patina, rough edges, folds and visually rich tactile surfaces--for *Street of Crocodiles* all in keeping with the inspiration from Schulz's descriptions of the alleys, shop

³ Ramirez, Juan Antonio, cited in: Affron, 1995, p. 31.

windows, moods and textures in his story. The Quays often use old, second-hand or discarded materials that have had a past use the physical world (a strip sample of thread colours that adorns the Tailor's shop cabinets, screws, doll fragments, cloth), and they re-appropriate this past use in the design and composition of the puppet or set constructions. This simultaneously provides a sense of recognition and effects a defamiliarisation. The attention given to details--semi-opaque films on glass surfaces or carefully sedimented layers of fine dust--creates an effect of both time suspended and time past. Reflecting on their first encounters with the technique, the Quays remark that they "could control every aspect of the film[s] to an unvarying degree: literally object by object, limb by limb, frame by frame. You conceive, live and animate at 1/24th of a second."⁴ The Quays develop and build their sets in an intimate tabletop working space where mostly just the two of them are engaged in developing ideas and trying them out: "The first thing you do is build the sets--you're really building your mise-en-scène when you've built the sets. It's important when you say 'are there going to be two windows, is there going to be one window and two doors?'"⁵ They have also been assisted with many of the technical challenges of their sets and puppets by master craftsman and technical adept Ian Nicholas. A furniture restorer by trade, he has worked with them on all their films since Rehearsals for Extinct Anatomies, creating many of the armatures, metaphysical machines, automata and other devices in the films, including commercials.⁶

The Street of Crocodiles sets were built in fragments that were then interrelated and diegetically connected in the editing process. Bearing the Quay's interest in collage in mind, I will explain my interpretation of the collaged convoluted and disconnected littering of space in Street of Crocodiles. The Quays developed a concept of set design based on this principle, in part because it allowed them the possibility to randomly join architectural images with varying perspectives:

[A]rchitecturally that was the first time that we'd really attempted something on that scale, and tried to use space in a way to deliberately confuse. . . . We realised in making [Street of] Crocodiles that we would need a whole collage technique of putting building fronting onto backs, backs onto fronts and to sides. It was the easiest way to actually execute that kind of confusion.⁷

⁴ Correspondence with Chris Robinson, 2001.

⁵ Quay Brothers interview, 1992.

⁶ Brooke, 2006, p. 10.

⁷ Quay Brothers interview, 1996.

As the script itself evolved during filming, the sets were central to its further development. The Quays had to make their most serious decisions when building the set, and sets were often rebuilt or adjusted as they realised something else was needed: "What we thought was the major--the middle--zone had to be sort of central, although when we first built it, we hadn't designed it like that. . . . You realise the necessity as you arrive at that time."⁸ As the production team was small, they were able to take this time to adapt and adjust the sets as they went along.

There are ten discernable main set fragments that either front onto the central set or are separate interiors, fragments that are also 'collaged' together in editing. The 'Theatre Stage' is the live-action scene at the film's outset that takes place in a real theatre. This set location was extant and corresponded to human scale. The set includes a hallway with a door through which the man enters the theatre, the main theatre space with chairs in rows in front of a raised proscenium stage with steps on the side leading up to it. The Quays placed the 'Wooden Esophagus', a vertical construction with structural affinities with a kinetoscope, on the live action stage. It has three distinct zones that are intrinsic to the shift from live action to animation. The 'Wooden Esophagus' exterior is a pulpit-like construction that is the intermediary object and passage to the animated, metaphysical realm. The outside of it is seen in the live-action sequence, and the transition from the live action set to the animated realm is instigated by a glob of spit that originates in the monochrome live-action realm. As the spit falls into the 'Wooden Esophagus' it is replaced by a similarly shaped animated object and the image changes to colour in the same framing that the live-action shooting ceases and the animation begins. The 'Wooden Esophagus' interior is a vertically oriented set with horizontal planes of blood-stained metal parts and razor blades, pulleys, and wooden walls. Cutting from the 'Wooden Esophagus', an 'Antechamber' is introduced as a set fragment of a wall with a street lamp above a door. In cross-cutting with the black and white exterior of the 'Wooden Esophagus', scissor tips that appear top right and snip the wires holding a puppet's arm suggest that it is standing inside the 'Wooden Esophagus'. The Quays also indicate the difference in scale between the hand using the scissors and the puppet inside the 'Wooden Esophagus', between the live-action and animated realms.

In Street of Crocodiles the main protagonist moves through and explores an architectural space. The film's experimental narrative is partially organised around

⁸ Quay Brothers interview 1992.

puppets' point-of-view structures and relies to some degree on the Kuleshov effect, as does much puppet animation.⁹ Once we have left the 'Wooden Esophagus' we enter the rest of the main 'Antechamber' area that is a fragmented set. The diegetic space is constructed in-camera out of separate sections: the doorway, the glass-roofed room and the wall with a ladder, screen and hanging gloves were separately built. The main 'Antechamber' is also the point of entry into the 'Zone' that is suggested by moving shadows and off-screen sound. This 'Zone' is the main set that is built around a three-sided central area lined by shop windows, recesses and doors and is flanked by the entrance to the Street of Crocodiles set. It is also the stage for some of the other puppets located in the shop windows surrounding the square. Towards the back of the square and contiguous with it, steps lead up to a raised area: this 'Street of Crocodiles' set extends into the distance and is fronted by an arch that is embellished with the form of a crocodile at the top. Buildings with windows lining the left side suggest tenements. The Quays explain how they came to conceptualise this labyrinth:

[The puppet] is lost in this realm. And as Schulz said, it's the zone marked in white on the map that is ill-defined and can't be defined because they can't map it. That's what I think first drew us to "The Street of Crocodiles" in Schulz, the opening scene, when he talks about the Street of Crocodiles, a certain zone in our metropolis which can't be mapped because it is sort of false. It's a false zone, a forged zone.¹⁰

In this 'forged zone', the puppet looks through a lit-up window in the Street of Crocodiles, and his point of view reveals a space that contains animated automata: the 'Metaphysical Museum' set fragment is seen through an eyehole (10:27-11:21). Other than the outside wall that the puppet looks through, the space he sees (and we see) through the window is undefined, in part due to extreme play with focal planes. This set construction appears to be inspired by the peephole window of Marcel Duchamp's assemblage installation Given: 1. The Waterfall, 2. The Illuminating Gas that was gifted to the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1969 (the year the Quays left Philadelphia).

Located off the 'Zone', a seventh set, the 'Hall of Mirrors' is defined by vertical planes of glass and mirrors that enclose and mirror the diegetic space and also

⁹ Grodal points out that this is a means to manipulate by montage and argues there are finer nuances in facial expressions that inform our understanding of a subject actant (p. 89ff).

¹⁰ Quay Brothers interview 1996.

provide glimpses towards a suggestion of off-screen space. The walls and mirrors form rectangular spaces, including a room that is littered with objects: dissected watches, an architectural arrangement of bleached bones, glass cabinets. A significant part of the film takes place in the 'Tailor's Shop' set (13:07-15:18) one of the shop fronts that 'Bruno' enters from the 'Zone' as he is lured in by the Tailor. It has two main spaces. The first is the entry to the main room of the 'Tailor's Shop' where the 'Automaton Waltz' takes place and where 'Bruno' is refitted with a porcelain head. The second (the ninth set fragment) is the Tailor's 'Back Room' houses the Tailor's collection of erotic objects. At the end of the film, the puppets move through an arrangement of 'Passages' (the tenth set fragment) and through the 'Hall of Mirrors', returning to the 'Tailor's Shop'. This is also the penultimate scene, followed by a final scene where 'Bruno' is seen crouching in the Wooden Esophagus' 'Antechamber' with a text passage superimposed above him. Besides the ten set fragments that are the puppets' diegesis, there are a number of mechanical apparatus shot mostly in medium close-up and close up, similar to the ones in the 'Metaphysical Museum'. These machines--pulleys with wires propelled into the distance, a bowl of metal parts, the trio of screws--were filmed in brief sequences in spaces that appear independent of the rest of the film's spaces and are intercut with them to suggest the life of machines and automata in the film. Together with these interludes, the collaged set fragments are interconnected to create the 'world' of the film.

Miniature Worlds

The Quays' interpretation of Schulz's labyrinthine spaces takes place in a world that is in miniature scale. In "The Philosophy of Toys" Charles Baudelaire writes of the powerful nature of children's toys and of a toyshop ask the question: "Is not the whole of life to be found there in miniature, and in forms far more colourful, pristine and polished than the real thing?"¹¹ During screening, these miniatures appear in proportional relation to the space and architectures that presents a world that is miniature no longer--rather, it is the world of the film. We may become aware of the actual size of such an object being used in an unconventional way. One pro-filmic aspect of scale is pragmatic: most sets are arranged so animators can work around them when manipulating puppets or other objects within the set. They can be constructed in such a way that sections of a four-walled rectangular room can be

¹¹ Baudelaire, 1853/1994, p. 16.

moved away during close-ups or other shots. The scale of the spaces is proportionate to the puppets' own size. In Street of Crocodiles, the 'Bruno' puppet is approximately 30 centimetres in height; the rooms, alleys and interiors were designed in accordance with its anthropomorphic proportions. A puppet is seldom placed in a natural setting or an existing architecture built to regular human scale, and if so, this emphasises the difference between the puppet and human beings. Scale is dependent on proportions: in the film, the puppets occupy a space constructed to accommodate their relative size. They walk through doorways, sit on chairs, look through windows and sit at tables that have been built to scale.

There are sequences in Street of Crocodiles and other films that subvert this rule. The Quays include elements and tools of their own handwork in the diegesis, in the set construction. The diegetic appearance of the animator, his hand or the metonymy of scissors or tweezers is frequent enough to be considered a defamiliarising function of the film. In the 'Metaphysical Museum' dandelion clocks are placed in the frame call attention to the size of the human hand that picks them as does an ice cube and as we sometimes see these objects in the same frame as one of the puppets, they break the illusion that the scale is equivalent to human proportions, an alienating and novel effect. Another defamiliarising prop they use are pairs of hand scissors (like those we would find in a workshop drawer at home) used in different scenes including the tips of a pair of scissors that looms over 'Bruno' or a tiny pair of scissors held by the Tailor. It also suggests the absent human hand that would use this tool and, in a fleeting moment, we become aware of the actual size of the sets, imagining the size of the hand that would hold the scissors, enormous in relation to the set.

Camera framing and perspective allow us to experience the world on screen as one we can understand, yet we know that these objects and spaces are much smaller than they appear to be. There are perceptual and experiential implications of the miniature for our cinematic experience of Street of Crocodile's narrative. Stewart has analysed the ways in which everyday objects can be narrated to realise certain versions of the world: "That the world of things can open itself to reveal a secret life-- indeed, to reveal a set of actions and hence a narrativity and history outside of the given field of perception--is a constant daydream that the miniature presents."¹² This echoes Schulz's microcosm, and part of the enchantment of the film has to do with animation of inanimate tangible objects and particularly with the miniature aspect of them.

¹² Stewart, 1993, p. 54

Stewart refers to a passage of Charlotte Yonge's The History of Sir Thomas Thumb that describes young Tom's first days in the world and how natural materials are transformed as miniatures:

The miniature has the capacity to make its context remarkable; its fantastic qualities are related to what lies outside it in such a way as to transform the total context. Thistledown becomes mattress; acorn cup becomes cradle; the father's breath becomes a cyclone. Amid such transformations of scale, the exaggeration of the miniature must continually assert a principle of balance and equivalence, or the narrative will become grotesque.¹³

There are moment in the film that the narrative of the Quay Brothers' film does become grotesque. Stewart proposes that "the hand [is] the measure for the miniature",¹⁴ and whilst this is self-reflexively evident when everyday objects like scissors are placed in the sets, the Quays do not strive for the principle of balance and equivalence Stewart mentions.

The balance between nature, familiarity and scale is constantly undermined, in that objects are foregrounded without explanation, without a contrived simile to a natural representation. Susan Sontag has suggested that there is a beautification of the grotesque, the common and the ugly by virtue of being photographed.¹⁵ The Quays' lingering shots extend this photographic beauty into a mythopoetic one: screws become titans; dust, a living layer, dandelion clocks gossamer rainfall. This is heightened by the images' haptic qualities. Examples of this are the 'Screw Dance' choreographed screws and 'Metaphysical Museum' scene's dandelion clocks and ice cubes: we see them through the small window, doing what it is that dandelion clocks do: their seed filaments detach from the centre to become a gossamer cloud, and the ice melts and reconfigures itself in reverse. There is no reason for these to appear in the film, no narrative motivation. We see them simply as a spectacle of the miniature, a performance that has the sole point of celebrating itself. Shot in close up with macro lenses, their gestures become gargantuan and spectacular, although we can estimate their actual size by comparing them to screws, ice cubes or dandelions we know in the phenomenal world.

¹³ Ibid., p. 46.

¹⁴ Stewart, 1993, p. 46.

¹⁵ Sontag, 1977, p. 15.

Stewart discusses transitions in written narrative from the inanimate to the animate. "In the depiction of the still life, attention is devoted to objects, but once the inanimate is animated, the parallel problem of description of action must be placed against the depiction of objects."¹⁶ In the film, narrative is often interrupted by a scene or shot of one of the machines formally treated in such a way that they have the calming effect of watching a still life or exhibit an element of the spectacle. The difficulty of description of action vs object also arises the scene with the trio of screws. Describing the screws themselves is relatively straightforward--composition, spatial relationships between them, textures and shapes--but once they begin to move, to unscrew 'themselves' from the surface in rhythmic movements that suggest complicity with the music, we begin to interpret the actions. The Quays describe how the screws in their film acquire a sense of presence:

Cel animation showing a screw coming out of the ground would only be a screw coming out of the ground in two-dimensionality. The point is that it can't be a clean screw, either. The important thing is that you felt that it was buried there for centuries, and it's sort of become unmoored, like migration.¹⁷

These hiatus-like cameos are scattered throughout the film. They are rarely still or inanimate, and attempting to describe their actions leads either to a description of movement or to a psychologising of them in relation to one of the figures. Marks proffers that haptic visuality--which is what these cameos generate--requires the viewer to work to constitute the image, "to bring it forth from latency . . . in this mutually constitutive exchange [she] finds the germ of an intersubjective eroticism".¹⁸ This can explain in part the fascination the Quay Brothers' films hold for many viewers, as the filmmakers experiment with a visual erotics Marks defines as: "one that offers its object to the viewer but only on the condition that its unknowability remain intact".¹⁹ The need to describe action of the animated inanimate is thus replaced by a sensual lingering, a haptic eroticism, that remains spectacular.

Stewart proposes "[t]here are no miniatures in nature: the miniature is a cultural product, the product of an eye performing certain operations, manipulating,

¹⁶ Stuart, 1993, p. 55.

¹⁷ Quay Brothers interview, 1992.

¹⁸ Marks, 2002, p. 13.

¹⁹ Marks, 2000, p. 193.

and attending in certain ways to, the physical world."²⁰ In *Street of Crocodiles*, the Quays take this a step further by including cultural and aesthetic references through their use of materials, styles and objects familiar to the viewer, and objects from nature or from everyday use (screws or scissors) emphasise the artificiality. A related visual trope is that of recycled and reiterated gestures, the empty movements that emphasise the non-human condition of automata: screws rotate aimlessly and the Tailor's Assistants' arms rotate in their arm sockets. The rubber band machine is either just that--a rubber band machine--or it is a metaphor for the tedium and uselessness of the Street of Crocodiles, transformed into a repetitive-compulsive gesture by the camera movement, framing and sound.

The miniature is perceptually close to our experience of the fantastic. Neither the miniature nor the fantastic 'exist' in the natural world--they are cocreated by the observer. The Quays seem to understand the fantastic as Tzvetan Todorov defines it: there is a moment of hesitation between a phenomenal and supersensible explanation whereby both the uncanny and the marvellous have a natural explanation. The fantastic, however, is when the reader (or viewer) cannot decry whether a narrative phenomenon belongs to the genres of the marvelous or the uncanny, as the fantastic exists between these two categories.²¹ Todorov's category of the fantastic is "that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event".²² This is the apprehension—and enchantment-- I have suggested their films can evoke. The Quays are cautious in their use of the fantastic:

If you are thrown too much into the fantastic, so that you lose all handhold, then it defeats you. In a sense you create a fantastic world, like in the Gilgamesh film [*This Unnameable Little Broom*], it is important to establish that [the puppet] has certain functions in that world, so that when further elements of the marvellous happen, you can move up to that plane, then back off, and then come back down.²³

The fantastic is an aesthetic means to express a visual correlation for the permeable borders between reality and vitality, between natural physical laws and the increasingly seamless inclusion of fantasy in fictional realism. Watching the scenes

²⁰ Stewart, 1993, p. 55.

²¹ Todorov, 1973, pp. 31-33

²² Ibid.

²³ Quay Brothers interview, 1992.

described above, we oscillate between understanding that this space exists outside the cinematic experience--in constructed miniatures--and giving ourselves completely to the haptic experience of the aestheticised, defamiliarised objects. A still or single-frame image can still be contextualised as a moment isolated from a continuum of living and moving through the world, whether cinematic or 'real'. This is, of course, part of the reason why the Quays can construct narrative that uses miniatures, but, in their framing and convergences of scale within the frame, they appear believably proportional, are haptically experienced and we engage with them physically. The animation reveals its 'secret life'. These indefinite spaces and the objects in them contribute to the otherness of the realm, a disjunctive nospace that creates a particular sensation of spatial uncertainty.

Spatial Uncertainty in Street of Crocodiles

A distinct feature of Street of Crocodiles is the singularity of diegetic space. Yet if the film intends to establish a sense of an extended world beyond the diegetic space, off-screen, non-diegetic space must also be suggested as an extension of on-screen space to create a sense of continuity with what we see on-screen. Although the puppets' gazes seldom wander beyond the perspective of the film's sets, we can imagine an off-screen imaginary space that is based on the spaces the film has already presented. The space is even more contained because shots suggesting 'natural' surroundings of the film's location (urban or countryside surrounding, sky) are extremely rare in this and almost all Quay films, or highly stylised, as in The Comb, In Absentia and Ex Voto (1989). When the puppet enters into the 'Antechamber' we see the sky through the glass roof (and in the alley off the 'Zone', although there is an indication of sky and perspectival horizon the film's realm seems hermetically sealed off from its surroundings, much like Schulz's environmental descriptions.. What kind of extended 'city' or 'world' surrounds and contains the spaces we visually experience? Are they similar to the ones in the frame? If not, can we imagine what they might be?

Burch defines six segments of off-screen space as the four borders of the frame, the space behind the camera (not geometrically defined) and the space behind the set or some object, and he divides these into two categories: imaginary and concrete.²⁴ In Street of Crocodiles, off-screen space on the whole remains imaginary. In the 'Dark Mutterings' sequence (9:31-10:20), the puppet looks behind a wall into a dark space and perspective lines that would indicate it does actually have a finite

²⁴ Burch, 1981, pp.17-21.

containment disappear as the intensity of light reduces to complete darkness. The soundtrack's sounds of whispering voices and mechanical workings of pulleys that transport a string into the dark seem to originate from this deep space, cueing the puppet to look behind the wall. The space beyond remains obscure and undefined. The Quays describe motivations for the spatial and aural mood of this scene:

What we wanted was that you felt that these strings were going someplace and being pulled by some force unknown, and you actually see the pulleys stop. But we found in the end that the string should be pulled by forces that even he should have no idea of. He is trying to discover where the forces may go and where they emanate from. But also you don't know in the end whether it's the Tailor, because earlier you saw the Tailor winding the strings up, so, in a way, it's a malevolent repetition.²⁵

There are few scenes where an off-screen space suggested by a look or a gesture becomes what Burch calls retrospectively concrete.²⁶ In the 'Hall of Mirrors' (11:58-12:52) we first see the puppet in close up behind mottled glass. Over the course of these shots, the camera pulls back to medium and then medium long shot to reveal the set that is constructed of glass and mirrors. The complexity of the Quays' construction of space and use of ellipses creates ambiguous space where the viewer cannot reconstruct 'where' she 'is' in the film. Most of the film's off-screen space is imaginary and evokes both apprehension and active engagement with a related tension that Burch describes as predictive:

This off-screen space might conceivably remain imaginary if no wider shot, no shot taken from another angle, or no camera movement is introduced revealing the person to whom an arm belongs, to whom an off-screen glance is directed, or the exact off-screen segment toward which an exiting character is headed.²⁷

By not alleviating the expectation with a concrete space our sense of orientation is undermined. This is especially the case in the shots and scenes with the Metaphysical Machines. Except for the ones in the 'Zone's' shop windows, the 'Hall of Mirrors' and in the 'Metaphysical Museum' we are given no indication where they are in the film's

²⁵ Quay Brothers interview, 1992.

²⁶ Burch, 1981, p. 21.

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 21-22.

spatio-temporal construction. Because such spaces are not located per se in the other sets or justified within the narrative, they have both a decorative effect but also one that elicits intellectual uncertainty (this will be discussed in more detail below in the context of an animated architectural uncanny).

There is a third kind of out-of-field that is worth considering--the non-diegetic space in which a film set is built. A recurring awareness during watching Street of Crocodiles (and perhaps any puppet animation film) that can momentarily break engagement with the film's fictional world is the knowledge that the set is small scale and positioned in the artists' studio. This is the kind of knowledge that we tend to suppress; otherwise, we are recurrently preoccupied with what its spatial relations are to the rest of the room: where are the filmmakers standing?--How is the set positioned?--If more than one set is used in the film, where is it placed in relation to the one we see on screen? Street of Crocodiles is a set of interiors--but in what relation do these interiors stand to off-screen space that is not part of the diegesis, of the cinematic realm we see? The Quays thus disrupt our expectations of the spatial relations of 'beside, through, in and beyond'. In the film, the space flows, it is unlimited, undefined, often illogical--we are not given enough visual clues to imagine a rational extension of the real space off-screen outside the shooting setup. This disruption of expectations can elicit a number of viewer responses, and one I am particularly interested in is apprehension caused by intellectual uncertainty, an uncertainty that has its origins in the uncanny.

The Animated Architectural Uncanny

The architectonic 'world' of the Quay Brothers' puppet animation films undermines our rational and phenomenological experience of built architecture. The intrusion of cinematography into the dimensions of architectonic space effects a whole series of essential aesthetic, phenomenological and practical shifts. As Helmut Weihsmann notes:

Cinematic architectural design provide insights into fantasies of form and space, they can reveal what prima vista remains hidden to the observer or what remains hidden without the cinematic apparatus . . . Film can be an instrument for reading architecture.²⁸

²⁸ Weihsmann, 1995, p. 56. Translation by the author.

French filmologist Anne Souriau identifies three functions of decors as affecting the reading of the (live-action) film set: decorative, which is pleasing; localising, which provides information about the film's events, and a symbolic function that "permits [the film] to express what either cannot be said or is best left unsaid, thereby investing the film with ideas and feelings, with signification."²⁹ There is another aspect of our experience of architecture in the Quay Brothers' films that is particularly compelling. Taking into account Souriau's concept of symbolic set design as expressing feelings, animated techniques can effect in us what is otherwise a private, personal and incommunicable experience: that of the uncanny.

Victoria Nelson suggests that "[i]t might be argued that the great Western critical voyage of discovery over the last century has been that of reinterpreting all phenomena of the universe within a secularised psychological framework."³⁰ One of these is Sigmund Freud's notion of the uncanny, one of many contributions Freud made towards secularisation of human experience. Anthony Vidler reframes this, in terms of architecture and space, as what he calls the architectural uncanny:

Architecture has been intimately linked to the notion of the uncanny since the end of the eighteenth century. At one level, the house has provided a site for endless representations of haunting, doubling, dismembering, and other terrors of literature and art. At another level, the labyrinthine spaces of the modern city have been construed as the sources of modern anxiety, from revolution and epidemic to phobia and alienation.³¹

Synthesising the individual features of set design and architectures, textures, puppets and automata, a particular feature that runs through many of the Quay Brothers' films comes to the fore: an animated architectural uncanny, an attribute that has affinities with the uncertainty of Street of Crocodiles labyrinthine structures. This concept illuminates the Quays' synthesis of historical architectural references and the vitalist undercurrent imagery that texts from Walser, Schulz and Kafka invoke. Because the film is a photochemical record of indexical reality, the uncanny relates as well to Susan Sontag's suggestion that "[a]s photographs give people an imaginary possession of a past that is unreal, they also help people to take possession of a space in which they are insecure."³² The apprehension that the Quays'

²⁹ Souriau, Anne 1952, p. 100.

³⁰ Nelson, 2001, p. 16.

³¹ Vidler, 1992, p. ix

³² Sontag, 1977, p. 19.

fragmented, collaged sets evoke originates in an intellectual insecurity, a significant factor in the experience of the sense of the uncanny.

Freud's concept of the uncanny ('das Unheimliche') derives from the a set of German words: Heimlichkeit (secrecy), heimlich (secret), heimelig (cozy, homey, homely) as terms defined in Daniel Sanders Wörterbuch of 1860,³³ words that expressed both a sense of happy, secure domesticity and one of privacy. The reason Heimlichkeit had such a high value in the late 19th century was because it was threatened by the relentless engines, both mechanical and metaphorical, of industrial development. It became an ambivalent idea in a period of uprooted traditions that were ultimately put to question by Freud. Vidler notes that "Swabian and Swiss authors seemed especially susceptible to such notions",³⁴ and they are central to the literary styles of Walser (a Swiss) as well as Kafka and Schultz. For Street of Crocodiles, the Quays were inspired by Eastern European villages and alleyways, imagery and film making--visual tropes that suggest a lost Heimlichkeit and Heimat (homeland) and carry the unfamiliar and the unknown with them, in part due to the isolation and alienation of these countries when the Communist regimes took power. Some of their later films foreground Swabian-related Bavarian ornaments, interiors and typography to create a mood that is both familiar and sentimental, but also pervaded with a sense of dread that arises from particular associations to the stiff self-imposed restrictions of the German Bürgertum (bourgeoisie).

In Vidler's reading of Freud's 1919 essay "Das Unheimliche" (translated into English in 1925 as "The Uncanny")³⁵ he addresses a central idea pertaining to space:

The uncanny is not a property of the space itself nor can it be provoked by any spatial conformation; it is, in its aesthetic dimension, a representation of a mental state of projection that precisely elides the boundaries of the real and the unreal in order to provoke a disturbing ambiguity, a slippage between waking and dreaming.³⁶

This mental state is articulated as experience in the 'worlds' evoked in Schulz's and Kafka's writing about the life of objects, and it is represented in the Quay Brothers' film by Bruno's slippage between the 'Zone' (dreaming) and the 'Antechamber' (waking). Although Freud aims to establish a set of general effects, one of his

³³ Sanders, 1860, 1, p. 729.

³⁴ Vidler, 1992, p. 24.

³⁵ Freud, S. (1919), "The Uncanny", S.E., 17:219-256.

³⁶ Vidler, 1992 p. 11.

notions--that one factor in the production of the feeling of uncanniness is intellectual uncertainty, which is also the meaning of apprehension I am using in this book--means that the experience depends on individual personal, historical and aesthetic experience, on perception and cognition. In other words, the sense of the uncanny in Street of Crocodiles is intimately bound to one's own perception and cognition of the world that informs the experience of the films 'world'.

Vidler has located a spatial and architectural uncanny, specifically in reference to "architectural speculation on the peculiarly unstable nature of "house and home" to more general questions of social and individual estrangement, alienation, exile, and homelessness."³⁷ He points out that the uncanny has been linked to architecture since the end of the eighteenth century, well before publication of Freud's seminal text. Vidler traces the spatial uncanny that he describes as developing "out of the aesthetic of the sublime to its full exploitation in the numerous "haunted houses" of the Romantic period imagined by Victor Hugo, Thomas De Quincey, Charles Nodier, and Herman Melville."³⁸ This list of authors, who aimed to flee their contemporary realities, can be expanded to include Kafka and Schulz, both of whom can be regarded as a variety of late Romantic authors. Haunted houses were prominent in early--silent--animation films, and the 'trick' technique of single-frame shooting brought houses to life: George Méliès' enchanted trick films or James Stuart Blackton's The Haunted Hotel (1907) and many of Charles Bowers' films. This trope continues to be a recurring theme in animation.³⁹ The house is dismembered, floating in space, and it visually develops in parallel with the main character's slow shift to madness. Staying close to Freud's own discussion of E. T. A. Hoffmann, Vidler discusses his short story "The Sandman":

It is in no way accidental that Hoffmann's almost systematic exploration of the relations between the homely and the unhomely, the familiar and the strange, extended to an equally subtle examination of the role of architecture in staging the sensation and in acting as an instrument for its narrative and spatial manifestations. Hoffmann was himself an amateur architect, stage set designer, and "collector" of strange houses."⁴⁰

³⁷ Ibid., p. ix.

³⁸ Ibid., p. xi.

³⁹ In 1953 UPA made The Tell-Tale Heart, based on the eponymous story by Poe, whose Gothic horror also evoke the uncanny. The expressionistic graphic design is entirely in keeping with the vertiginous sense of Poe's tale.

⁴⁰ Vidler, 1992, pp. 27-28

The Quays made a dance film based on Hoffmann (that is discussed in a later chapter), and other filmmakers have interpreted Hoffman's short story. Paul Berry's puppet animation The Sandman (1991), draws directly on his explorations of how staging space can create an uncanny sense. Extremes of geometric abstraction and exaggerated human behaviour and movement create a fantasy world between waking and dreaming in which inner sensations become an active part of the protagonist's outer, 'experienced' world. Vidler describes Hoffman's synthesised inner and outer 'worlds':

Hoffmann, despite his accentuated irony, found in architecture the tangible sign of a musical harmony unattainable in sound. He also "designed" with meticulous care the settings of his stories, delineating spaces that, sympathetically as it were, resonated to the psychological dimensions of his characters, not simply the illustrations of primitive Gothic terror but the constructed equivalents of the psychological uncanny in architecture.⁴¹

Schulz's tale and his descriptions of his stories' settings and objects bear comparison with Vidler's description of Hoffmann's texts. His account of Hoffmann's attention to architectural subtleties rings true for Schulz's evocation of spaces that are in close psychological proximity to his characters. Even in the short story upon which Street of Crocodiles is based, Schulz creates a mood in keeping with the sense of loss and longing for another, more heimlich environment. Although the film makes limited direct references to the written text, there are scenes and settings that are direct representations of architecture described in the story. The following passage from 'The Street of Crocodiles' could almost be a reverse ekphrasis, a literary description of the Quays' 'Zone' set:

One could see there cheap jerry-built houses with grotesque façades, covered with a monstrous stucco of cracked plaster. The old, shaky suburban houses had large hastily constructed portals grafted onto them which only on close inspection revealed themselves as miserable imitations of metropolitan splendour. Dull, dirty, and faulty glass panes in which dark pictures of the street were wavily reflected, the badly planed wood of the doors, the gray atmosphere of those sterile interiors where the

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 28.

high shelves ere cracked and the crumbling walls covered with cobwebs
and thick dust, gave these shops the stigma of some wild Klondike.⁴²

The uncanny ambiguity between waking and dreaming is especially evident in The Comb, Rehearsals for Extinct Anatomies, Nocturna Artificialia and Street of Crocodiles, that can be interpreted as cinematic representations of mental states—the 'slippage between waking and dreaming' takes place on the screen. This was a favoured topos of the Surrealists, although it is generally accepted the Surrealists gave no indication of being aware of Freud's concept, Hal Foster renegotiates a link between Surrealist principles and the uncanny. As it expands Vidler's discussion and my argument, I would like to linger briefly on one discourse Foster engages with. There is an expression of the architectural uncanny in the film that relates to animation's use of what Hal Foster calls the "prized emblems in surrealism: romantic ruins . . . evocative of the space of the unconscious . . . and modern mannequins, with the status of both intimate and alien."⁴³ Foster goes on to describe the uncanny aspect of these two tropes: "[i]n short, in both images the animate is confused with the inanimate, a confusion that is uncanny precisely because it evokes the conservatism of the drives, the immanence of death in life."⁴⁴ This is also evident in the literature discussed previously, and is, indeed, one of the defining features of those authors' writing--the animistic bringing to life of inanimate objects. Many of the Quay Brothers' films, including Street of Crocodiles, make heavy use of these two types of images. The Quays' earlier films feature spaces full of ruinous passages and references to 'dead' architecture, rooms, townscapes and streets (Street of Crocodiles, Nocturna Artificialia). And, as we will see in the next chapter, the second trope prevails in doll-headed puppets with protruding armatures, bolts and wires (This Unnameable Little Broom, Rehearsals for Extinct Anatomies), or actual screws that have a subterranean life of their own.

By incorporating automata in puppet and object design and 'romantic ruins' in their sets, the Quays create an especial capacity to suggest the uncanny. According to Freud, "[T]his uncanny is nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated only through the process of repression. . . . something which ought to have remained hidden but has come to light."⁴⁵ The Quays' eerie use of familiar objects in a collaged and montaged

⁴² Schulz, 1977, p. 101.

⁴³ Foster, 1995, p. 21.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Freud, 1919, p. 241.

spatial uncertainty and the illusion created by the cinematic apparatus brings this 'something' to light twofold: the 'bringing to life' of inanimate objects on the one hand, and the cinema's capacity to allow us to experience what we logically know is impossible but secretly wish is not. The fundamental phenomenon of all puppet animation films--the animation of the inanimate--goes against logic in terms of our experience of the phenomenal world. This causes intellectual uncertainty, and a sense of apprehension, and, at the same time, fulfils what Freud calls an animistic wish for omnipotence. This "relates to the unrestricted narcissism of an [animistic] stage of development, which [strives] to fend off the manifest prohibitions of reality."⁴⁶ Bruno Schulz's father's animistic ramblings about the 'generatio aequivoca' are also his withdrawal from the world and its prohibitions.

One of the attractions of animation is the absolute control of the image. For the viewer, the 'manifest prohibitions of reality' are circumvented in the experience of the have to do with a pleasure that Michael O'Pray describes as:

the idea of a certain pleasure achieved by animation (not all of course) wherein we identify with its virtuosity... It is not simply a characteristic of the animation but somehow is an integral part of how it affects us. In this virtuosity where form and content reach a perfection, there is the deepest pleasure because we are confronted with a control and importantly, the very fantasy of that control in the animated figures. In other words, in the plasmatic element--the sheer virtuosity of the lines, say, in Disney, or for that matter, in the animation films of Robert Breer or Len Lye--we have an objectification of our own desire for omnipotence. Our desire to will something without in fact acting upon it is acted out in animation itself through the virtuoso use of forms.⁴⁷

While O'Pray is discussing drawn animation, the 'desire to will something' is a desire that Schulz possessed and gained pleasure in through his writing, and while we 'know' the puppets and objects in Street of Crocodiles cannot be experienced as 'real', we gain a omnipotence-related pleasure from their animate behaviours. Freud suggests that "[a]s soon as we see something actually happens in our lives which seems to confirm the old, discarded beliefs we get a feeling of the uncanny . . . the whole thing is purely an affair of 'reality-testing', a question of the material reality of

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 240.

⁴⁷ O'Pray, in Pilling, 1997, p. 200.

the phenomena."⁴⁸ Freud concludes that "[a]n uncanny experience occurs either when infantile complexes which have been repressed are once more revived by some impression, or when primitive beliefs which have been surmounted seem once more to be confirmed."⁴⁹ The revival of a sense of omnipotence helps the viewer to escape the unsettling experiences of intellectual uncertainty and its related apprehension, whilst retaining the pleasurable ones. Thus the animated architectural uncanny is not only confirmation of the animistic wish for omnipotence, which would could regard as desire in Schopenhauer's terms of the will-to-live, but also a return of the repressed belief that the dead can be resurrected--screws frolic, automata 'live'. Nelson suggests that "consuming art forms of the fantastic is only one way that we as nonbelievers allow ourselves, unconsciously, to believe."⁵⁰ It may not be overstating that the fantastic elements in the Quay Brothers' films (and, indeed, in many puppet animation films) can contribute to fending off the 'manifest prohibitions of reality', redeeming the lost state of belief in contemporary secular experience.

The Quays engagement with spatial themes of inside / outside and imagined / experienced mirror Schulz's continual negotiation between the real and metaphysical worlds. They transform the objects and materials they work with into imagery that expresses both real and imagined experiences of space, imagery that is cocreated by the viewer. Atkinson has suggestively described the Quays' narratives as "parabolic";⁵¹ whether labyrinths, zones or maps, what predominates in these two artistic works--text and film--is a preoccupation with differences between metaphysical description and the phenomenal world, and with dream and disorientation. The collaged set fragments and the ones the Quays suggest off-screen, and the way they are constructed in editing, create the architectural labyrinth of Street of Crocodiles. This combination, that evokes a sense of the uncanny (and apprehension), locates their works in an anachronistic 'Sturm und Drang' ('Storm and Stress', the German precursor of English Romanticism), yet it is not pure. It is tainted by surrealist gestures, an aesthetic of erotic psychopathology and the ruddy, bloody wonders and machineries of medieval occult and pre-positivist science—that recall Zielinski's 'an-archeology' of technological vision described in the Introduction. Manifest throughout is a sustained engagement with metaphysical concepts, using puppet animation to transcend the physical and corporeal nature of the materials they use. The Quays describe their spatial conceptualisations:

⁴⁸ Freud, 1919, pp. 247-48.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 249.

⁵⁰ Nelson, 2001, p. vii.

⁵¹ Atkinson, 1994, p. 39.

In the puppet films, we came to terms with conceiving of space: whether it was to be stylized (the great privilege of animation) or realistic, a metaphysical space or a fantastic, nongeographical space, a mental configuration . . . Whatever form the space took, it was always firstly a poetic vessel through which the fiction would course.⁵²

Besides being referred to as surrealists with regard to their early films, the Quays' work can be placed in contexts of architectural postmodernism and deconstruction. The Passage de L'Opera in Paris, demolished to make way for 19th century city planning, is an image that inspired some of their set design, and it is also one of the images Breton described in his examples of romantic ruins.⁵³ A viewer's response to an internet review web-published in 2002 also makes a distinction between the general use of 'surreal' and Breton's definition of the term:

Seeing Street of Crocodiles and some of the Quays' other short films some years ago was one of those experiences that changed me forever, and I continue to wait impatiently for each new film. They say here that they are tired of the term "surreal," which is indeed overused, but it has always seemed to me that they, more than anyone else working today, realize Breton's definitions of surrealism, and particularly his notion of "convulsive beauty." If their work is not "explosante-fixe, erotique-voilee, and magique-circonstancielle," what is? ⁵⁴

The Quay Brothers' sets and puppets are often included in displays at festivals. The most recent Dormitorium exhibition is a self-curated collection of Wunderkammer, 18 cases of the Quay Brothers' meticulously designed and crafted sets and stage designs. What fascinates is not simply the detail and the miniature scale--the performance of these sets in the cases also pulls the viewer in. Bending over to look into the non-perspectival depth of a set from The Piano Tuner of Earthquakes or peering through one of the convex glass windows, the distorted vision of a set fragment becomes cinematic, similar to the macro lenses and focus pulls the Quays use in their films. In their non-cinematic stillness, the puppets no longer dominate and define the space. The sets' materials are the stars here: fabrics and cultivated dust

⁵² Nichols Goodeve, 1996, p. 84.

⁵³ Quay Brothers, in Rust Grey, Quay Questions II, p. 5.

⁵⁴ Deussing, 1996.

(Street of Crocodiles), nurtured patinas on metal and wood (The Piano Tuner of Earthquakes), mottled and textured surfaces (Rehearsals for Extinct Anatomies), starry, magnetized iron filing 'fur' (Stille Nacht 1 (Dramolet)), air-layered paper sculpture (The Calligrapher). The opportunity to linger over exquisite detailing that can go undiscovered in a film's crepuscular lighting and time-based projection is one of the exhibition's attractions. Although they provide audiences the opportunity to see the relation between the screen world and the mechanical and technical investment required for puppet animation, for the Quays, these displays are not representative of the films:

They are in no way meant to be seen as finished objects when seen in isolation out of the natural context of the very films themselves. They lack entirely the further additional multiple potentials of sound, music, lighting, the choreography of rhythm and movement of puppets or objects through framing; and lastly, the interpretative mise-en-scène applied to all these. Retroactively, they are a reminder of the static imitation of the film's otherwise natural evanescent flux.⁵⁵

The sets are the environment for the films' 'actors'--the natural evanescent flux of the puppets, automata and metaphysical machines.

⁵⁵ Quay Brothers interview, 1996.

Chapter 6. Puppets and Metaphysical Machines

Puppets and automata have transfixed audiences for centuries and hold a prominent position in artistic and critical discourses around cultures, human behaviour and the imaginary world. They continue to have a huge range of use within contemporary arts, performance and film. Until the cinema took its place as a reproducible medium of expression, it was mainly in puppet theatres, automata constructions and private salons that audiences experienced these empty vessels modelled on human likeness. They were also prevalent in the post-Enlightenment period coinciding with German Sturm und Drang and Romanticism that followed, a period when a number of significant philosophical treatises and doctrines reacting against rationalism and empiricism were written. In literature, authors including Ludwig Tieck and E.T.A. Hoffmann (more recently, Schulz), describe the world of these stand-ins for human behaviour. Literary works and treatises, such as Heinrich von Kleist's "On the Marionette Theater" and Schulz's "Tailors' Dummies", published in the same book as "the Street of Crocodiles", reacted to these discourses.¹ Richard Weihe has written about how Georg Büchner also formulated thoughts on the marionette as a metaphor for the relationship between the individual and society.² All include thoughts on the automaton's maker and his (rarely her) relationship with it. While many of these uses of and concepts for puppets are valuable, I am interested how the fact of their 'presence' in the phenomenal and cinematic worlds implies a different viewer experience. The Quays' automata and puppets act as intermediaries between their world and the 'world' they evoke on screen--they are, as the creators, embodied in their puppets. The main issues I concentrate on in this chapter relate explicitly to the Quays' puppets: the role of the animator in creating movement, and its overlaps with and distinction from puppet theatre; a taxonomy of the Quays' puppets and their contextualisation within a specific corpus of puppet animation; specific phenomena that enable the viewer's engagement with these constructions of non-living matter, and finally, how the Quays' juxtaposed puppet constructions engender the viewer's dislocutory, cocreational participation.

The Quays' studio is a tactile atmosphere populated by strange and exquisite objects: Puppets they have built and used in their films are perched on books, or jumbled together in dusty piles in glass display cabinets. A cymbal-holding monkey

¹ Schulz, 1977, pp. 51-71.

² Weihe, 1992, p. 39.

wind-up toy that could fit on a hand lies in close proximity to a 'dominatrix' female doll with the boldly painted face and naked breasts, the Alice puppet from Stille Nacht films is on tiptoe, immobile. Suspended by strings or collecting their own unique dust on shelves, they seem to lie waiting for their opportunity to slip into one of the films. Commodification of fragmented objects is part of the Quays' charm as artists: their puppets and objects alter the experience of materials in two ways. The obvious one is their use of the puppet animation technique, which endows non-organic and organic matter with the illusion of movement. The other, more subtle, both elatory and disturbing, and shifted into the realm of poetry, is the synaesthetic effect of music, movement and textures. Images of dust-cloaked objects pulled out of sleep, induced or accompanied by unusual sounds, are recurring tropes and form a dominant aesthetic element of the Quay Brothers' animation.

The Quays have made dozens of puppets, themselves or with assistants. Many of them seem to share unmistakably 'Quay-ish' qualities; others seem to drift away from what we come to expect from one of their characters. In their own words: "Puppet films by their very nature are extremely artificial constructions, even more so depending at what level of 'enchantment' one would wish for them in relation to the subject, and, above all, [depending on] the conceptual mise-en-scène applied."³ In each film they make, there is a practical division of labour: each of them is responsible for the puppet he builds and meticulously animates, the other operates the camera and arranges lighting, but these roles are very loose and each of the filmmakers ultimately does everything. The move from collage to puppet animation in the late 70s also meant a shift in the Quays' interest in other artistic concepts and production. A new challenge lay in adapting the stylistic possibilities of 3D puppet construction: "[P]uppets always held a strange mystique for us--the power of the mask, its 'otherness', the fact that you had to 'read' them."⁴ The new dimension of 3D space meant they had to find a way to express their graphic style in a new set of parameters. Without training in puppet design, they had been daunted by the complexities of animating puppets in Nocturna Artificialia. The main figure was designed using a standard small-scale jointed wooden model that is used by artists to understand how the human body moves. Although the figure was the scale they wanted to work with, it was impossible to animate, because its armature was not stiff or sensitive enough to be able to maintain the delicate incremental movements that single-frame shooting requires. Dissatisfied with the experience, they took recourse

³ Quay Brothers, 1986, p. 1.

⁴ Quay Brothers correspondence with Chris Robinson, 2001.

to using *objets trouvés*. In *Languages of Art* Nelson Goodman suggests that "[i]n representation, the artist must make use of old habits when he wants to elicit novel objects and connections."⁵ Their longstanding custom of regular early morning visits to the numerous flea and antique markets in London and abroad provided the Quays with unusual and bizarre objects that could be used as they were or transformed into novel hybrid forms.

The Dancing Demiurge

Puppets are embodiments of what Nelson describes as the "ideal of Renaissance Hermeticism and Neoplatonism propounded most famously by the natural philosopher and heretic Giordano Bruno: the divinization of the human."⁶ In a kindred spirit, centuries later another author speculated on the nature of the puppet, exploring the distinction between human and puppet performances in search of which of these could be considered closer to perfection. A contemporary of Schopenhauer, Heinrich von Kleist was a German author responsible some the first attacks on rationalism and the Enlightenment; his plays and short stories with extreme characters explore his despairing view of the failure of reason. Nelson suggests Kleist was a "frustrated theurge" and it is tempting to speculate that had he lived to experience the invention of animated cinema, this frustration may have been soothed.⁷ His 1810 philosophical conversational essay "On the Marionette Theater" offers an insightful and tantalising set of literary and philosophical proposals and paradoxes about the marionette that are particularly relevant for animation, and markedly so for the Quays' work with puppets.⁸

In the text, an unnamed figure, in conversation with Mr C., a dancer at the opera, ponders the qualities of grace in the movement of puppets and the factor of human volition:

I asked him if he thought the operator who controls these puppets should himself be a dancer or at least have some idea of beauty in the dance. He replied that if a job is technically easy it doesn't follow that it can be done entirely without sensitivity. . . . But, seen from another point of view, this line could be something very mysterious. It is nothing other than the path

⁵ Goodman, 1976, p. 33.

⁶ Nelson, 2001, p. xi.

⁷ Ibid., p. 64.

⁸ "Über das Marionettentheater", first published December 13, 1810 in the Berliner Abendblätter.

taken by the soul of the dancer. He doubted if this could be found unless the operator can transpose himself into the centre of gravity of the marionette. In other words, the operator dances.⁹

Animated puppets, as actor-objects, have no character, indeed, no 'life' of their own without the animator's involvement. An issue of central importance to understanding the experience of the Quays' constructions is clarification of the status of these animated objects and how we relate to them. We see a moving image, but we know that the objects we see appear 'alive' through pure artifice. A partial answer is of course Mitry's statement that "[o]ne might say that any object presented in moving images gains a meaning (a collection of significations) it does not have "in reality", that is, as a real presence."¹⁰ But we also know that in contrast to live-action figures, puppets do not 'exist' except as inanimate objects beyond their animation on screen. The spectator may oscillate between this awareness and a sublimation of it that allows him or her to perceive animated objects as living. The animator as puppet operator not only dances—he or she is able to give the puppets a semblance of Kleist's soul via the vitalism implicit in their animation. In a challenging essay relating animation film to literary examples of the automaton and marionette (Kleist and Hoffmann), Richard Weihe distils the essence of this distinction:

First, it seems obvious that in Kleist's set-up we can replace the "machinist" by the "animator" of an animation film, while the marionette is equivalent to the animated figure. But what about the strings of the marionette? For the puppeteer they are the technical device by which he controls the marionette's movements; in puppet animation these "strings" are invisible, indeed, non-existent. Their function is replaced by the technique of frame-by-frame animation. Consequently we could go on from here and question whether the sculpted figure could be replaced by film trick or even the animator himself.¹¹

In puppet animation, the marionette's 'dance' is a complex process of usually between 12 to 24 individual changes of the puppet's position per second. Whether the dancing or oscillating balls in Rehearsals for Extinct Anatomies or Stille Nacht II (1992), screws in Street of Crocodiles, twirling and rotating in dust, or the Gilgamesh

⁹ Kleist, 1810/1994, p. 3.

¹⁰ Mitry, 1997, p. 45.

¹¹ Weihe, 2006, p. 41

puppet cycling across the floor, the puppets' movements are planned and executed with an exacting calculation. The puppets 'dance' on screen, the final result of careful manipulation in front of the camera over a period of time that is exponential in comparison to the brief moments we see the puppet on screen.

Kleist's acquaintance describes two results of the marionette's movements: the puppet is not guilty of affectation, which he regards as an advantage, the other is weightlessness, which is less pertinent, as Kleist is discussing hand-held marionettes:

For affectation is seen, as you know, when the soul, or moving force, appears at some point other than the centre of gravity of the movement. Because the operator controls with his wire or thread only this centre, the attached limbs are just what they should be. . . . lifeless, pure pendulums, governed only by the law of gravity.¹²

The Quays' puppets (or some other puppet animation for that matter), while 'lifeless', they do not appear to be so and they need not be governed by laws of gravity. The discussion continues and the acquaintance declares that "where grace is concerned, it is impossible for man to come anywhere near a puppet. Only a god can equal inanimate matter in this respect. This is the point where the two ends of the circular world meet."¹³ In terms of puppet animation and vitalism, we can interpret this grace as an expression of Schopenhauer's "the thing as such" (*das Ding an sich*) in that the material / mechanical qualities are enhanced by an apparent will endowed by puppet animation's animistic properties, a will that is vitalist in essence. The two ends of the circular world are vitalist at the one end, phenomenal at the other. The essay ends with Kleist unconvinced, the acquaintance declaring that "grace itself returns when knowledge has as it were gone through an infinity. Grace appears most purely in that human form which either has no consciousness or an infinite consciousness. That is, in the puppet or in the god".¹⁴ In puppet animation, these two qualities merge: the lay figure, the puppet, through the hand of the animator and the technical apparatus of animation filmmaking, is endowed with grace.

Concepts in Kleist's essay neatly overlap with the intrinsic qualities of puppet animation. In an analogy, the animator is like a Neoplatonic 'god' that can circumvent the mechanistic-materialistic limitations of matter to give it properties of Schulz's extraordinary element of matter. In doing so, by distancing human volition

¹² Kleist, 1810/1994, pp 5-6.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

by at least one level, since the animator must 'act' through the puppet, the animator summons forth a sense of grace while concurrently investing the puppet with an appearance of consciousness. The inherent paradox is the animistic vitalism of the animated figures: they do not need a physio-chemical state to 'live'. Bordwell and Thompson, referring to the control of a figure's behaviour in the *mise-en-scène*, draw attention to the fact that:

the word "figures" covers a wide range of possibilities, since the figure may represent a person but could also be an animal (Lassie, the donkey Balthasar, Donald Duck), a robot (R2D2 and C3P0 in the Star Wars series), an object (as in Ballet mécanique's choreography of bottles, straw hats, and kitchen utensils), or even a pure shape (as in Ballet mécanique's circles and triangles).¹⁵

Figure, of course, also refers to the protagonists in literary texts like Schulz's or Walser's, be they human or inanimate objects. The similarities between characterisation in literature and the literary origins of the Quay Brothers' films are pertinent when reflecting on the specific, imaginary qualities they achieve. The written text relies on the reader's ability to make his or her own 'inner picture' of the characters described in texts. In film, the puppets may be photographic representations of real objects, but these actor-objects, have no character, indeed, no 'life' of their own without the animator's involvement. Mitry describes the reader's powers of imagination in the following way:

But whatever [the author] may do to try to lose his own personality from his work, the author is always evident in his characters. However true and lifelike their psychology, it is nevertheless a subjective creation, since analysis, in literature, is merely the author's opinion of his characters, his detachment as he considers them, judging them by absolute criteria which he himself establishes. It only becomes genuine psychological analysis when the subject is the author himself, observing himself, studying himself, and telling his own story . . .

The cinema, on the other hand, presents only actions. Though the characters are the creation of the filmmaker, at least they are there, present and active, "in the flesh". Dissociated from creative imagination, they seem

¹⁵ Bordwell and Thompson, 1993, pp. 157-58.

to have an independent, exclusive existence which is objective and no longer merely conceptual. However basic their psychology, it is always "located". The characters are drawn according to circumstance and their development always depends on an effectively "experienced" reality. They are human beings in the world; they act and are acted upon.¹⁶

With some exceptions (The Comb, Street of Crocodiles, and In Absentia) none of the Quay Brothers' shorts have an actor who has an independent, extrafilmic or non-filmic existence. Mitry's distinction of characters cannot account for the animated puppet that cannot be 'dissociated from the creative imagination'; in fact, it embodies exactly this, in that its 'existence' is defined entirely by the conceptual process of its construction and animation. This is further strengthened by Arnheim's proposal that the author "is not tied to the physical concreteness of a given setting . . . He does not have to worry whether the combinations he creates are possible or even imaginable in the physical world".¹⁷ What we see is the character of the animator transmuted through the materials and the way the puppet is made to move in the cinematic realm. Puppets also "act and are acted upon": yet the animator determines all actions. Without her intervention, puppets remain an inanimate representation. They can be endowed with anthropomorphic qualities and certain character 'traits' through posture, body proportions, facial expression, gesture, clothing and accessories. This is equivalent to the descriptive element of characterisation in writing. Yet the puppet does not 'act' until it has been manipulated by the animator's hand, given his or her 'signature', shot in single frame method and projected. Each of them is the result of stylistic and aesthetic decisions made during construction, and later, while animating their gestures and actions. Animation character creation bears comparison to writing in that, in Mitry's definition, the subject is the author him (or her)self. The Quays are, indeed, "evident in [their] characters". In this way, puppet animation presents more than what Mitry calls "actions"--it presents a highly subjective and minutely controlled extension of the live and 'in the flesh' animator and his or her creative process.

A character's psychology, which Mitry somewhat nebulously describes as "located", raises a further issue that is problematic when describing a puppet. If Mitry means that it is located in the living being who is taking on the role of the character, then where is the psychology of a puppet--its motivation attitudes and

¹⁶ Mitry, 1997, p. 50.

¹⁷ Arnheim, 1958, p. 170.

reasons for actions--located? The obvious answer is that it is the filmmaker who determines the psychology, since she determines all actions. The personality and psychology of the filmmaker is transmuted into the characters, "ascribing to it his thoughts or emotions". For now it suffices to say that its psychology is 'read' by the audience using codes of style, behaviour and gesture and sound. It is also, to a great degree, 'constructed' out of the often anthropomorphic qualities of the puppet's appearance.

Mitry refers but twice to animation films in his aesthetic and psychological analysis of cinema.¹⁸ It is telling that he places terms like "in the flesh" or "experienced" reality in quotation marks, and a phenomenological treatment of the issues he raises can effectively remove the tentative quotation marks he inserts. His assumption that the animated image is simply another form of the cinematic image needs expansion. Its alienated forms, its expressive fantasies, and its variety in technique and materials are but few of the factors which make it distinct from other kinds of cinema and enables creative filmmakers like the Quays to express and allow us to experience unique ideas and concepts unique to animation. Peter Wollen raises a similar issue: the discrepancy between text (script) and performance (film):

The distinction between composition and performance is vital to aesthetics. The score, or text, is constant and durable; the performance is occasional and transient. The score is unique, integrally itself; the performance is a particular among a number of variants.¹⁹

In puppet animation film these variants are not as free-form and unreliable as in live-action nor are they as constant and durable as in 2D animation. The characters in puppet animation can be constructed and animated exactly as the animator intends--depending of course, on the skills of the puppet maker and on who is animating the puppets. Wollen suggests further that "The distinctive marks of a performance, like those of somebody's accent or tone of voice, are facultative variants."²⁰ Voiceover is another way of endowing character--feature length animation increasingly uses well-known actor's voices. It is relevant that the Quays' puppets, however, are mute. Stewart suggests that "[t]he automaton repeats and thereby displaces the position of its author."²¹ While the Quays 'author' their puppets, their emotions and thoughts are

¹⁸ Mitry, 1997, pp.254-256;p. 258.

¹⁹ Wollen, 1969, p. 105.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 106.

²¹ Stewart, 1992, p. 60.

a transmutation of the filmmakers own, and the performance is created by the technical means of animation. This elides wonderfully with Kleist's notion that the path to the marionette's soul is created through the 'dance' of the puppeteer.²²

The Quays' puppets, objects and machines follow a lateral 'hierarchy' of performance. The main puppets develop the narrative and interact, and the others, while their performances are often interludes and rarely interact with the main anthropomorphic figures, contribute to the apprehensive mood of the film, suggesting the undercurrent, vitalist realm in Rehearsals for Extinct Anatomies, Street of Crocodiles, In Absentia or the Stille Nacht films. And throughout the films, screws dance, metal fur gyrates, balls oscillate and watches pirouette as the camera reveals the films' hidden recesses and corners. Compared to these metaphysical machines, the sculptural human simulacra puppets divulge little sense of emotion and retain a single facial expression throughout a film. The static facial expression of these puppets can create a dislocutory apprehension as the puppet's emotional registers are not communicated facially. While movements are limited (and assisted) by armatures, the curve of a hand or the fixity of a gaze remains the same in each scene regardless of the action. While similar static forms are often used in puppet animation, the Quays' puppets performance has more affinities with Antonin Artaud's concept of hieroglyphic theatre (that was his aesthetic response to experiencing Balinese theatre): a "metaphysics of gesture" where narratives are told through "states of mind, which are themselves ossified and reduced to gestures--to structures."²³ He suggests "a kind of terror grips us as we contemplate these mechanised beings, whose joys and sorrows do not really seem to belong to them but rather to established rites that were dictated by higher intelligence." Artaud's express interest in metaphysics leads us easily to vitalism, and the terror he experiences softens in the Quay Brothers' works and the animistic state of the puppets to a form of pleasurable apprehension for the viewer. By guiding the viewer emotionally mainly via the sound track, it also means the anthropomorphic puppets do not dominate the composition, i.e. the sets and other objects aren't necessarily only in the service of the main figures. Their intentional display of the puppets' physical construction is also a stylistic decision: visible armatures, body parts identifiable as those of porcelain dolls, collage or bric-a-brac assortments of diverse materials, for instance, a Dalí-esque skirt of boxes instead of hips and legs for the tailor's assistants in Street of Crocodiles. They are a manifestation of the second of Hal Foster's prized

²² Kleist, 1810/1994, p.

²³ Artaud, in Sontag, 1976, p. 215-227. I thank Mark Bartlett for this observation.

emblems in surrealism: "modern mannequins, with the status of both intimate and alien."²⁴ Intimate, because of the pretty dolls head and body parts, alien, because of the material contradiction between the torso and the bottom half of the construction.

Andre Habib posed Kleist's question to the Quays, asking them if they believed that a puppet can have more grace than a dancer. Their response is another conceptualisation of Kleist's argument, one that reflects on animation and possibly on experiences gained in the dance films they had made in the years previous to the interview:

Certainly not. It's of a different kind. I don't think you can ever compete with the human body, the way a dancer can. But I think a puppet can achieve other things, on a more symbolic level. You would never make your puppets work the way a dancer can and we wouldn't begin to attempt it. It's a sort of empty virtuosity, even to begin. It's important to watch what a dancer can do. ²⁵

Atkinson aptly summarises a analogous relationship between dance, animation and puppets: "As wholes, Quay films are carefully considered answers to the question of how many angels can dance on the head of a pin--and we realize the question is fruitless: It doesn't matter. What matters is the dance itself."²⁶ Animation is the dancemaster genie in the bottle.

Matter, Insecticity and Flesh: A Typology

The combination of a particular style of puppet animation and the influence of non-animated cinema contextualise the stylistic wealth of the Quays' puppets. Their puppet animation films are part of a contemporary continuation of what constitutes a canon that includes Georges Méliès, Ladislav Starewicz, George Pal, the Gebrüder Diehl, Joanna Woodward, Jan Svankmajer and Kihachiro Kawamoto. European animators dominate their list of influences, but the Quays also mention Charles Bowers' films, and visual echoes of his absurd machines appear in many a Quay film. The Quays' puppets bear the most relation to those of Starewicz, Svankmajer and Bowers that use insects, plants, found materials and other objects of the tangible world. The Quays' puppets are distinct from conventional dimensional animation

²⁴ Foster, 1993, p. 21.

²⁵ Habib, 2001.

²⁶ Atkinson, 1994, p. 44

films that use plasticine or latex puppets: the figures are made of armature-based hard materials and have fixed facial expressions and body forms. Softer materials are malleable, and alterations in facial expressions, body movements and shape are often carried out on the puppet in front of the camera or by utilising exchangeable facial features: lips, eyes, eyebrows. For the Quays, their process varies: "Puppets sometimes are built first. Usually they are built after the sets, because you know the tonal range and texture of the set."²⁷

Street of Crocodiles features a mix of puppet styles: Bruno (the main figure), the Boy and the Tailor are constructed analogous to the human figure. The three Tailor's Assistants are composites of female torsos mounted on boxes with drawers and wheels that propel them. The Boy, the Tailor and his Assistants have similar ceramic heads, unlike the Bruno puppet, whose head is made of plaster. This sets him apart from the 'world' of the other puppets, and perhaps is an indication that he is in a dream world. All of these puppets are armature-based. Other anthropomorphic puppets include a female doll with a naked rubber torso and cloth legs, a monkey with cymbals (an old wind-up toy), and a wooden puppet (that makes a repeated physical gesture of vomiting) with a moveable mouth that suggests it may have been used by a ventriloquist. These three puppets, originally dolls or toys, have a historical and cultural palimpsest in their appearance and character. An anthropomorphic figure constructed out of glass pieces and light bulbs arranged on an armature stands out stylistically somewhat from the other puppets. Besides the anthropomorphic puppets, the film features a collection of objects, machines and unusual constructions: the 'metaphysical machines' that often introduce a hiatus in the narrative. These include a variety of screws, a 'rubber band machine', pulleys, mechanical devices and pocket watches. All of these are animated in the film. The sets also contain other non-animated objects that embellish the mood, such as a meticulously arranged pile of bleached bones, a stack of boxes in a window and the elaborate interiors of the Tailor's shop that visualise the spaces Schulz describes: "the storerooms, which could be seen through the open door, were stacked high with boxes and crates--an enormous filing cabinet rising to the attic to disintegrate into the geometry of emptiness, into the timbers of a void."²⁸

The animated figures in most of the Quay Brothers' animated shorts are made of cloth, plaster, glass eyes, bits and pieces of materials, metal and wood. The main figure in Street of Crocodiles, perhaps a simulacrum of Schulz himself, is a gaunt

²⁷ Quay Brothers interview, 1992.

²⁸ Schulz, 1977, p. 102.

construction of the Quays' preferred materials: its head is roughly crafted of ravaged plaster, with luminous, liquid glass eyes, a tailcoat hangs on its graceful, haggard frame, and its thin, delicate hands are so expressive that each hapless gesture they make is poignant. In some films, for instance, Street of Crocodiles, the Stille Nacht shorts, or The Comb the construction of these fragments is an intended human or anthropomorphic simulacrum, because of the design, gestures and 'personality' the Quays decide to 'give' it. In others, like the one-eyed wire and plaster homunculus of Rehearsals for Extinct Anatomies or the insectlike creature from In Absentia, other, unsettling attributes dominate. Although the materials of its construction can indicate their origin, i.e. the puppet's heads are ceramic and were originally used to make dolls, the puppet is built exactly according to their specifications. On a suggestion that their puppets can have a propensity to appear too 'human', the Quays commented: "You have to be careful. We found the Tailor's head in the markets and in a sense you realise you have to build a body that would fit it."²⁹ The choice of materials also has consequences for the film's mood. The Quays:

If you create the density of the world that you're out to create, the audience will make that leap and be won by the fiction. If it senses that the puppet is just a little ragamuffin and thinks 'Aha, you use little bits of mop for the hair', then you've lost. It is as if, right away, the fiction--orders of power--abducts so powerfully. And even then, if [the camera goes] in close up, I think you wouldn't know if you looked at one of our puppets--you really believe that it's come from some other realm, that it hasn't been made.³⁰

These levels of enchantment are achieved by a unique typology of puppet design. Besides the anthropomorphic puppets, automata and simulacra, the Quay Brothers have consistently used what I call insecticity in their films where insect-like figures feature prominently. Whether the Enkidou character in This Unnameable Little Broom, a composite of bird and insect, or disturbing anomalies in Rehearsals for Extinct Anatomies, Nocturna Artificialia and The Comb that resurface in altered form in In Absentia and in The Piano Tuner of Earthquakes, this is a distinct type of figure. Often winged, usually sinister and in some instances the source of conflict or a turning point in any of these films, insect-like puppets embody both a darker side of the psyche, but also provide an aestheticised rendering of entomological beauty.

²⁹ Quay Brothers interview, 1992.

³⁰ Ibid.

Using insect-inspired puppets is an unusual method to bring elements of the natural world into the animated realm that have an organic, living reference (unlike many of the other objects). Because insects are so thoroughly non-human they have had a strong symbolic use and a prominent in used in some so-called primitive, animistic cultures for ethnoentomology, a branch of cultural entomology.

Citing Ladislav Starewicz, whose insect féeries transformed silent slapstick narrative into an enchantment, as one of their favourite filmmakers, the influence of his films on the Quay Brothers' works is easily understood. Although dating from Early Cinema, the visual impact of his insect fantasies can easily be programmed together with contemporary animation. Unlike the archaic quality of most films from the first decade of the 20th century, Starewicz's films seem timeless in their effect and quality. This is in part due to an animistic aspect of his work that transforms stylised stag-beetle, grasshopper and other insect body parts into bizarre animated puppets in a fantasy world rooted in human commodities and traditions. Starewicz's films are narrative (The Dragonfly and the Ant, 1913), often comedies (The Cameraman's Revenge, 1912), but others, like The Insect's Christmas (1913) or Carousel Boreal (1958) are slightly disturbing films and are more informed by an animistic feel. Atkinson suggests that one of the enduring qualities of his work is the fact that his creatures are "only barely anthropomorphised . . . No matter how lighthearted the scenarios, his films play like ghoulish pantomimes for entomophobes."³¹ Whilst some of the Quays' insect-like puppets engage in human behaviours, there is far less parody--because far less anthropocentric narrative--than in Starewicz's films.

The Quays have created their own unique entomological bestiary and insecticity is a persistent visual trope that runs throughout their opus. In the early films, the battling brothers in Ein Brüdermord are two scorpion-like puppets that battle to the end. In later films insect-inspired figures often act as the motor that drives a conflict. A winged Enkidou incites Gilgamesh to battle in This Unnameable Little Broom. In The Cabinet of Jan Svankmajer, the pupil hesitates as he is required to put his hand in a box containing an unseen fur-embellished spider, and even the bullet projectile in Stille Nacht III (1993) has the instinctual determination of a winged insect. There is something coldly eerie and vegetal about these puppets--they have another life besides the one invested in them with animation and distinct from vitalism. It is the secret life of insects, instinctive, an aggressive drive to survive, conquer and dominate. When asked by Roberto Aita about the nightmarish quality

³¹ Atkinson, 1994, p. 40.

of their films, the Quays proposed an analogy between the world of insects and the 'world' of In Absentia:

We really believe that with animation one can create an alternate universe, and what we want to achieve with our films is an 'objective' alternate universe, not a dream or a nightmare but an autonomous and self-sufficient world, with its particular laws and lucidity. A little like when we observe the world of insects, and we wonder where the logic of their actions comes from. They can not talk to us to explain what they are doing; it is a bizarre miracle. So, watching one of our films is like observing the insect world. The same type of logic is found in the ballet, where there is no dialogue and everything is based on the language of gestures, the music, the lighting, and the sound.³²

Instead of using insect-like puppets to illustrate familiar aspects of human behaviour, the Quays draw the viewer into a world that provides few comforting familiarities. The 'autonomous and self-sufficient world' is isolated, time and rhythm are suspended and replaced by the fascination of the puppets' bodies, textures and scurried, instinctually autistic actions. This instinct is enhanced with what appears to be a primordial animistic intellect driven with consciousness and intent. Simultaneously brittle and armoured, the Quays' puppets are well suited to the stiff armatures they are built on. Non anthropomorphic, angular and darting movements and unexpected gestures contribute to the unease of watching them. The 'objective' alternate universe' in In Absentia is the coloured 'world' of an insect-like creature. Traces of these insects find their way into the commercials--in a commercial for Fox Sport Television, they animated stag beetle puppets playing hockey. Instead of unsettling, these puppets act out a Starewicz-like slapstick humour (no pun intended), pirouetting and aiming puck passes at each other. Seen together with the other organic materials they use--brittle insect husks, dried star anise, thorny rose stems, fluffy dandelion clocks--a theme reveals itself: artificial constructions that add animistic qualities to materials from the natural world.

Other kinds of organic matter feature as well: an enduring image that most viewers of Street of Crocodiles readily recall (and still evokes gasps in the cinema) is in the 'Tailoring' scene where the tailor seems to 'conjure' a slab of liver on a table. He proceeds to 'fit' it by smoothing tissue paper over its wet surface and rows of pins,

³² Aita, 2001.

like marching soldiers, proceed to insert themselves into the paper and flesh. The Quays describe how this scene was conceptualised:

We always thought it should be a megalomaniac tailor, who senses that, after the Second World War, when the powers that be divide up the borders and re-stitched the seams as it were, just shifts them--that's the scar. And so he sort of strokes the seam of the scar tissue, but you're basically showing that the country's a piece of meat, which can be carved up like this, in the sense that the meat comes out. And it's the same thing metaphorically, he had a client on the left who he was going to dress, dress as meat, so there were two fittings. You can map out a country or you can map out a man . . . they're [both] meat.³³

As it makes a fairly clear allusion to the political history of Poland, this is an unusual scene in the Quay Brothers' otherwise relatively non-ideological oeuvre. In another scene, pins extrude out of soft kidneys that have been sensually caressed by one of the Tailor's assistants. In The Cabinet of Jan Svankmajer, a drop of blood on a tissue sets the clockwork of the Svankmajer puppet in motion, in Stille Nacht III an egg leaks blood and in The Comb two hands force a ladder through a reclining puppet's torso, rending glistening, wet bloody flesh. Real organs and flesh in animation have been used by other filmmakers; fresh or in various stages of decomposition, they draw attention to the power and paradox of animating body parts. What is particular about it is its direct relation to our own physical, embodied experience and the jarring effect these sanguine animated chunks have on us. The slab of liver, the smooth kidney seem to come to life, in spite of the undeniable, visible 'truth' of their obvious 'deadness' butchered from the body of an animal, the 'deadness' of the material is enchanted via its animation.

Cut out of interdependence shared with the absent body, and placed in a *mise-en-scène* and animated, these sequestered organs take on new meaning. Torben Grodal suggests that "representations that focus on the relative autonomy of interior parts of the body are often experienced as particularly non-human."³⁴ This can explain how aversion or alienation we experience in these scenes can give way to curiosity or pleasure. A good example of this is Svankmajer's claustrophobic Light, Darkness, Light (1989) one of a number of films with pieces of meat, tongues, and

³³ Quay Brothers interview 1992.

³⁴ Grodal, 1997, p. 110.

intestines (Food, 1992, Dimensions of A Dialogue, 1982, The Death of Stalinism in Bohemia, 1990). In the first few scenes the film seems quite predictable because of its use of clay metamorphosis popular in conventional films, but the introduction of real, bloodied organs belies Svankmajer's disquieting intent. A collection of clay body parts hear a knock on the door which opens and a glistening severed tongue enters the room, initiating a the human assemblage of glistening eyeballs and dismembered body parts which, upon completion, becomes a human mockery that too big for the room--the final claustrophobic, uncanny scene insinuates many possible conclusions. In Svankmajer's films the body is used and reproduced as a mechanism embedded in an ideological critique. His films transport both an ideology and a sense of Surrealist revolt, inasmuch that surrealism questions the 'taken-for-granted' bourgeoisie aspects of oppressive society. In his works, he plays out submerged political and social discourses through the devices of metaphor and symbolism. The pieces of flesh are usurped and alienated from their original function, from a body that once was alive, and put on display. They express ideological and cultural relations in their interactions that result from the animator's intentions and use of metaphor.

The Quays' use of flesh is more specifically aesthetic: the kidneys and liver that appear in Street of Crocodiles are integrated into the compositional finesse of the sets and the puppets interact, stroking them with smooth, sensual caresses. The Quays also use these pieces of flesh as an element of poetic and stylistic interpretation of Schulz's text; they are stand-ins for that hapless matter so enamoured by the rambling father in "Tailor's Dummies": "Matter is the most passive and most defenseless essence in cosmos. . . . Homicide is not a sin."³⁵In the scene with the tailor's assistants, a kidney, placed at the bottom of an anatomical illustration of a vertical penis is erotically stroked while deeply embedded sharp pins extract themselves. The liver is pierced by pins as well, and violence is done to a meaty pocket watch: in the 'Watch Death' scene, an assaulting gang of marauding nails unscrew themselves from the tabletop and 'screw' themselves into the glass watch face, and in a rare sound effect that actually matches what we see, we hear breaking glass. The watch face cover flips up, the pocket watch pivots to reveal its back metal cover that opens to reveal bright red, flesh-filled interior, like a skinned animal. Glistening, it quivers as the nails' murderous trajectory pierces through and they emerge from the flesh to return to the table top and roll off-camera, like thugs

³⁵ Schulz, 1977, p 59.

into darkness. Raw flesh adds an additional layer of unease to the other kinds of matter in these disturbing and beautiful animistic rituals.

Empathy, Texture and the Grotesque

The puppets in the Quay Brothers' films are artificially constructed, defamiliarised representations. Why do we engage with them? How do they move and engage us? Nelson Goodman's remarks on representation address emotional engagement with figures: "A notable difference is that since, strictly speaking, only sentient beings and events can be sad, a picture is only figuratively sad."³⁶ This becomes more complicated if the word 'picture' is substituted with 'puppet'. Since a puppet is neither a sentient being nor a painting, why can it evoke emotions such as sadness? The animated puppet 'exists' but it is not alive--it is what Goodman calls a "man-representation" but is a puppet without denotation?³⁷ This is where the tangibility of the puppet and the Quays' design and manipulation of it becomes a key element in our understanding of what it represents. It is a construction of 'in-the-world' materials that are assembled to be a 'man-representation'. It is also a representation imbued with an animistic force, on the one hand through the cinematic illusion of the animation technique, and on the other, by the emotionally underpinned movements and gestures that the Quays put them through incrementally while filming, that, in screening, suggest sentience.

Many Film Studies investigations in this area of spectatorship are premised on a cultural understanding of what we see (Bordwell, Grodal, Carroll). Since many of the worlds animation depicts can have little to do with the tangible world, the viewer must be able to develop different schemata than those she constructs for live-action film which is more or less photorepresentational, although digital animation is, of course, changing this dramatically. Although rooted in an understanding of the world we live in, the mental processes animation stimulates and activates have much more to do with a set of experiences and schemata located in the imagination, the locus of most artistic production. Any relatedness to physical phenomena must necessarily come through an association, a mental model, or some kind of sensible equivalent in the phenomenal world. It can also be based on previous experience of similar visual moving image work--we can learn to read these worlds the more we are exposed to them. In contrast to the drawn or painted representational worlds of

³⁶ Goodman, 1976, p. 50.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 25.

pure animation, the 'universe', 'realm' or 'world' particular to the Quay Brothers' films is determined by their formal techniques and style applied to objects that occupy 3D space.³⁸ In this way their reception is related to an overlap of our experience of fabrics, objects, materials and spaces in the phenomenal world with the 'world' the films present.

A further insight into the viewer's engagement that relates to Mitry's proposal is found in Christine N. Brinckmann's exploration of empathy and anthropomorphic 'endowing of soul' to abstract forms in the Absolute films of Walter Ruttmann and Viking Eggeling. She describes how movement creates alliances and choreographies between the figures and then queries the audience's engagement. "In light of such cinematic processes the temptation is there, both to identify the moving forms and to animate them with characteristics and intentions."³⁹ I suggest besides the emotions elicited by the puppets modelled on human form, we feel a sense of empathy and identification with a variety of the Quays' more abstract constructions, from the *pas de trois* of dancing screws to the violently pierced, bloody pocket watch. Ed Tan's writing on comics and film is generally helpful when trying to define what evokes an emotional response in animated figures.⁴⁰ In terms of abstraction, it gets more interesting when Tan describes two versions of aesthetic fascination in film: fictional emotion, that is stimulated in the fictional events in the diegesis; and artefact emotion, that originates in an admiration for the film's construction and its formal parameters. These are usually deemed to be secondary, but for non-conventional animation film and figures I suggest that with the Quay's films, artefact emotion can be the primary emotional stimuli. Tan remarks that the emotions allow us to access subjectivity of individual figures and suggests typical artefact emotions are enjoyment, astonishment and admiration.⁴¹ This reaction is remarkably similar to the state of enchantment Bennett describes, a feeling that implies emotional response, and both artefact emotion and enchantment are bound up with the discovery and understanding of events and figures we will not experience in the phenomenal world. Paraphrasing her concepts I introduced in Chapter 2, Bennett describes the mood of enchantment as engendering a surprise state that result from a pleasurable feeling of being charmed by the novel and as yet unprocessed encounter and a more *unheimlich* (uncanny) feeling of being disrupted or torn out of one's default sensory-

³⁸ For an extended discussion on spectatorship and puppet animation see Buchan, 2006 and <http://channel.tate.org.uk/media/37995738001#media:/media/37995738001/24922396001&context:/channel/most-popular>

³⁹ Brinckmann, 1997, p. 265. [author translation]

⁴⁰ Tan, in Brüttsch, Hediger et al, 2005, p. 265.

⁴¹ Tan, 1996, p. 2.

psychic-intellectual disposition. She describes the effect of enchantment is a particular mood that includes senses of fullness, plenitude, or liveliness.⁴² Bennett's concepts are also helpful to disassociate the emotions animation evokes in spectators from a common misconception that they are childish or regressive. Animation evokes this surprise state, in that it is a novel encounter and its worlds can disrupt the sensory-psychic-intellectual disposition—this is the moment of apprehension that often occurs when watching the Quays' puppets. Bearing this in mind, I would challenge Grodal's discussion of spectators' difficulty in engaging with non-anthropomorphic figures:

When watching a visual representation of phenomena without any centering anthropomorphic actants, we often 'lose interest' owing to lack of emotional motivation or the cognitive analysis of the perceived, a fact which many makers of experimental films have discovered when presenting their films to a mass audience.⁴³

Rehearsals for Extinct Anatomies, the Stille Nacht films and many lengthier scenes in Street of Crocodiles, the Comb and In Absentia do not have anthropomorphic actants. We comprehend the objects as what they are--a screw, a ping pong ball, a pulley, a rubber band machine--but also experience the sense of enchantment and emotional, sensual presence animation endows them with. The combined effects of empathy, artefact emotion and enchantment I've proposed offer a useful solution to understanding why Grodal's claim does not hold for the Quay Brothers' films that do without what he suggests are necessary centering figures, and, indeed do films from a good many other animation filmmakers.

Nelson suggests that as a writer, Schulz belongs to "the category of European high-art grotesque."⁴⁴ Many of the Quays' puppets are grotesque in the sense Nelson defines as a Surrealist grotesque: "the juxtaposition of incongruous elements [that has a] crucial aesthetic goal: that of collapsing the boundaries between subject and object, representing interior human feelings as exteriorized objects in the environment."⁴⁵ They combine human-like body parts and armatures with materials and fragments of other objects and juxtapose incongruous elements. The viewer alters his

⁴² Bennett, 2001, p. 5

⁴³ Grodal, 1997, p. 89.

⁴⁴ Nelson, 2001, p. 86.

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 205-206.

understanding of these elements to be able to understand them. Grodal has some interesting thoughts on this process:

It is important to emphasize that cognitive identification (and empathy) are normally established at a very general level. In films about animals or in animated cartoons we can identify with animals; that is, we reconstruct their wishes, plans, and needs; but we do not mentally construct special 'quadruped', 'winged', 'finned' or 'beaked' mental models except in very special situations where the context demands the rudiments of such models in order to make a situation comprehensible. It is easy to make such identifications with beings very different from ourselves, because the specific motor realization of mental models normally takes place at a non-conscious level of the brain.⁴⁶

He suggests that the viewer is engaged in different levels of specification and that character identification is developed by what he calls 'texture' and narrative that enhance these learning models: "the salience and activation-power of fictions may be enhanced if the 'texture' of protagonists has a close match to that of the particular viewer."⁴⁷ This could explain the attraction of adults to a wide range of cartoon animation that uses the Kindchen schema in character design.⁴⁸ Grodal's use of 'texture' refers to socio-historical, class-culture or gender-specific mental models. We can also understand 'texture' in a literal sense. The materials from which animated figures are constructed as 3D objects are composed out of materials that are not what we would expect a human being to be made of, but the bits and pieces are familiar to us from our own forays in flea markets or stowed-away boxes in the attic. And the objects often embody something else. In the Tailor's back room in Street of Crocodiles there is a glove on the wall containing long strands of looped hair that partly protrude out of it. I asked the Quays whether the glove was a reference to themselves: "No, to Krafft-Ebing [laughter]. It was the rear room [of Schulz's story]. It was all about the fetishisms, you know, and everything that Schulz's more suppressed 'louche' side would conjure up."⁴⁹ A viewer familiar with the context of

⁴⁶ Grodal, 1997, p. 93.

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 92-93.

⁴⁸ The behavioural anthropologist Konrad Lorenz suggested that human perception of infant-like appearance that is dominant in higher animals and man triggers an instinctual urge to care.

⁴⁹ Quay Brothers interview, 1992.

von Krafft-Ebing will be rewarded in these moments, if their 'textural' mind set is aware of the reference.⁵⁰

Thus, 'texture' can also explain why audiences are drawn to the Quays' puppets: the actual 'textures' of these figures. Grodal proposes that "we only have a very general awareness of our body. We do not have constant mental representations of our toes, ears, breast(s) or other specific body parts: they only attract attention on special occasions."⁵¹ Unfortunately, Grodal doesn't elaborate on what these 'special occasions' might be. I would suggest that the Quay Brothers' puppet animation can be such a special occasion. Although the Quays invest their puppets in Street of Crocodiles with human-like qualities, the textures of body parts, their surfaces and fixity of materials constantly draw our attention to their difference from our own flexible, fleshed bodies. Grodal investigates how we understand what he calls 'humanness', a term that sometimes appears in single quotation marks and sometimes not. He does remark that divining the essence of humanness is a recurrent theme in ambitious films (and I'd suggest, in monster and automata-centred B-films) that it is deeply philosophical and is often used in a negative way, when this attribute is lacking.⁵² The determination of this arises from:

contrasts and differences to other living beings, as when humanness is determined by delimiting it in relation to a beastly otherness that has its own raison d'être, but the determination is often subtractive: the essential human features are implied by describing certain human-like but 'non-human' actants, who retain some features comparable to those of humans but who still lack some 'essential' human features."⁵³

The otherness in Street of Crocodiles has less to do with beastliness than with a raison d'être that is motivated by Schultz's descriptions of matter and animistic qualities of animated automata.

Many of the Quays' anthropomorphic puppets have sweet faces (the porcelain doll's heads were, after all, originally made to appeal to children and women) that have a strong appeal in moments of confusion or emotion, for instance, in two scenes in Street of Crocodiles shot in closeup: the Boy sees the dominatrix-tinged female

⁵⁰ Viennese psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing was one of the founders of scientific sexology, and he is credited with coining the terms sadism and masochism. His Psychopathia Sexualis (1882) documents abnormal aspects of sexuality.

⁵¹ Grodal, 1997, p. 92.

⁵² Ibid., p. 106.

⁵³ Ibid.

torso (15:19-15:32), or the Tailor's Assistants shocked by a screw (16:29-16:50). Grodal suggests that "[m]assive viewer-interest indicates that the phenomenon of 'humanness' has very strong cognitive and affective appeal."⁵⁴ But he also points out that "non-humanness often comes in two variants: the negative variant, in which it is connected with the subhuman, and that in which the non-human features are connected with the superhuman, whether evaluated as positive, negative, or complex."⁵⁵ The Quays' grotesque puppets, combinations of objects and human attributes, are in the second category, and are of the type of figure (as well as Grodal's winged, beaked, finned ones) Bennett describes in her proposition to offer an alternate to what she terms the "disenchantment tale" of modernity and contemporary life--"a place of dearth and alienation and of control."⁵⁶ She proposes an alternate tale--one that is highly pertinent when thinking about the Quays puppets described here--filled with what she calls "sites of enchantment that include: "the discovery of sophisticated modes of communication among nonhumans, the strange agency of physical systems at far-from-equilibrium states, and the animation of objects by video technologies and animation whose effects are not fully captured by the idea of 'commodity fetishism'."⁵⁷ In the animistic 'world' of the Quay Brothers' films, their puppets perform non-human communication without linguistic structures, and their musically choreographed motions and gestures incite empathy and enchantment that is distinct from such emotions elicited by anthropomorphic or human forms.

Matter, Automata, Portmanteau Puppets

Automata are abundant in the Quays' films. An automaton concept was central in the script for their second feature and it is especially prominent in films made after Street of Crocodiles. The Quays emphasise this: "Technically, Street of Crocodiles is a kind of vast automaton notion. In fact, in a sense, the character cuts himself free, doesn't he? In fact, that's the conceit to say that a real automaton would still be tied to those strings."⁵⁸ They appear to be autonomous characters independent of the hands that crafted them, but there is an intrinsic difference: artefacts, but 'alive'; objects, but apparently sentient (on screen). The apparently independent movement of animated

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Bennett, 2001, pp. 3-5.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p.5.

⁵⁸ Quay Brothers interview, 1996.

puppet's actions and its 'experiences' makes them a different kind of automaton than the hapless ones described in literature or actors in the role of an automaton. A puppet can appear to see, respond, gesture, act and understand, yet outside of the film frame, a puppet is simply a puppet.

In The Architectural Uncanny, Vidler also develops concepts about contemporary architectural design around the body: "Freud's analysis of the uncanny effects of dismembered bodies is especially redolent for the interpretation of architectural fragmentation that rejects the traditional embodiment of anthropomorphic projection in built form."⁵⁹ Vidler goes on to describe the criteria: in pieces, fragmented, torn apart and mutilated, or having infinitely ambiguous and extensive interiors and exteriors.⁶⁰ Sculptures, paintings, puppets and photographs of such bodies are prevalent in twentieth century art. One need only mention Hans Bellmer, Georg Grosz, Umbo, Raoul Hausmann, Hannah Höch or Cindy Sherman. In 1999, the exhibition "Puppen Körper Automaten--Phantasmen der Moderne" (Puppets, Bodies Automata—Phantasms of the Modern) opened in Düsseldorf, a remarkable and comprehensive historical collection of artworks, co-curated by Pia Müller-Tamm and Katharina Sykora. Müller-Tamm describes the attraction these objects can have:

These exemplary artefacts have--already before their entry into the artistic work--an ambivalent character: They represent on the one hand that made by humans, for a second-hand nature, for the constructed and controlled, for the mechanically functioning, instrumental, servile, for objects and things. On the other, they offer a vivification through the user's or viewer's fantasy, and then reveal a magical, frightening, unsettling, irritating and alienating effect.⁶¹

The fragmentation becomes exceptionally uncanny in the Quays' set design and puppet construction. They are referential, fragmentary, incoherent and deracinated from existing architectural constructions and spaces as the puppets can diverge from anthropomorphic human proportions and appearance. The characteristics listed above are reinterpreted in Vidler's description of the re-inscription of the body in architecture, and transformed again in the uncanny body that figures prominently in the Quays' puppet and set designs. The uncanny effect in Street of Crocodiles is

⁵⁹ Vidler, 1992, p.xi.

⁶⁰ Ibid., pp 69-70.

⁶¹ Müller-Tamm, 1999, p. 67 [author translation]

provoked to a great degree by the use of historically specific, concrete inanimate materials--plaster, wood, old fabrics, rusting metal, wire constructions--that create an ambivalence of knowledge between this and the pathetic (empathetic) fallacy of anthropomorphisation, in the moment when these materials are attributed with senses, feelings and cognisance. The traces and residues that permeate Street of Crocodiles are redundant materials--salvaged window panes, threadbare fabrics and antiquated mechanical apparatus--a bricolage of bits and pieces that collects the remnants of a locus that no longer exists--a romantic ruin. Although the architectural elements of the sets seem to suggest containment and coherence, it is in the very fact that fragments are usurped from an origin that is no longer there that provokes an apprehensive oscillation between their temporal and spatial dislocation and the hermetic 'completeness' of the set.

The Quays' puppets function as doubles, as fetish objects, and they also raise queries that recall theories of the double, of simulacra and automata, all of which figure in the authors discussed previously, and vitalism and animism are at play. Jonathan Romney suggests: "The Quays do not so much animate dead matter, as dramatise the deadness of matter. Quay puppets are not alive but undead; they don't have lives, they have after lives."⁶² Robyn Ferrell suggests:

Objects and graphics function as narcissistic 'doubles' as a protection against death: But doubling generally is uncanny because of a kind of primitive thinking, now surmounted but not eradicated, [Freud] says. The splitting into two (e.g. the invention of a soul) was a narcissistic protection against death. But, following its repression, the double returns as a 'harbinger' of death.⁶³

In puppet animation film, the double returns as harbinger of death on two levels: as an object constructed of lifeless materials, and as an animated 'double', it is doubly uncanny. The homunculus' twitching eye in Rehearsals for Extinct Anatomies, the Alice doll's overextending ankles in the Stille Nacht films, the almost human gestures of pulsing, pumping apparatus--the Quays' uncanny images of lives and afterlives evoke a apprehensive pleasure at seeing the impossible: blood-smeared razorblades and bloodied, flesh-filled pocket watches; rusty screws that free themselves of their holdings and roll away off-screen to reappear and re-imbed themselves in a

⁶² Romney, 1992, p. 25.

⁶³ Ferrell, 1991, p. 133.

floorboard; a beam of light that shines on a light-bulb figure instigates its movement and it begins to furiously polish an object made of the same materials as itself. Jean Baudrillard suggests the automaton "is an interrogation upon nature, the mystery of the existence or non-existence of the soul, the dilemma of appearance and being."⁶⁴ In the film's dark, hermetic passages, the fragile objects and aimless figures carry out pointless tasks: the insect-like rubber band machine that rhythmically, in perpetual motion, aligns, stretches, breaks and replaces rubber bands to repeat the cycle over again; pulleys revolving, machines churning and screws swirling. These vitalist loci are part of the 'world' of the film, populated by bizarre, sometimes endearing, sometimes erotically charged objects. We are puzzled by their repetitive purposefulness: it is a purpose without a point. The dilemma of their fantastic construction of lifeless objects is partially resolved by movements that suggest an appurtenance of being.

There may be a deep satisfaction in seeing objects and puppets that are constructed in such a way to suggest that they bear resemblance with living or moving things. The Quays describe some of the themes at work in their films in this way:

You're dealing with darker forces and darker elements, if something goes pathological it sort of deroutes and goes beneath and more subterranean, it could be sexual, it could be psychotic, it could be anything, but I think we tend to leave it a bit more vague. I think in general the pathological scores at a very deep level, it can be very true, it can be very real. Also, nature deroutes and creates strange, as it were, pathologies, but it's aberration in a way, and you're talking about the aberrational, but at a more symbolic level.⁶⁵

These deroutings causes a pleasurable apprehension that is not specific to anthropomorphic puppets. The writhing layers of iron filings that cover surfaces in Stille Nacht I: Dramolet can evoke this, as can a hand sensually stroking a moist kidney or caressing a slab of liver (Street of Crocodiles) the dancing, or a twitching finger in The Comb. There are more 'deroutments': the homunculus rubbing the mole in its head in Rehearsals for Extinct Anatomies, or at the end of Street of Crocodiles, when the graceful Tailor's Assistants begin a repetitive, hapless rotation of their

⁶⁴ Baudrillard, 1983, p. 93.

⁶⁵ Quay interview, in: Wright, 1994, p. 13.

arms, armatures exposing material intimacies of the shoulder's stuffing and sharp metal parts⁶⁶, when the small events of these theatres carry over into the lives of the anthropomorphic figures. They, too, are machines, automata, not only at the beck and call of the crafty Tailor but answering to some deeper, sublime or metaphysical power that suggests they are trapped in their forms, bric-a-brac constructions of cloth, metal and porcelain. But it is the music that suggests this--a sweet, poignant pleading violin that pulls us deeper in to engage on the emotional level of the music. This is one of the few moments in the film where the puppets seem to be part of a community, lost souls in the deteriorating memory of Schulz's magic and forgotten world.

Bricolage and its close relative, assemblage, perhaps best exemplified by the works of Kurt Schwitters, Cornell's boxes and Duchamp's 'readymades', figure abundantly throughout the Quay Brothers' filmmaking. Their acumen to construct isolated bits and pieces into unusual objects and, indeed, sculptural artworks contributes to create analogies between natural materials and idiosyncratic perception of the world contributes to the haptic qualities, the textures, forms and sensual intensity that makes many of their works unique. Animation then imbues their materials with a vitalist urge akin to the descriptive writings of the authors, reifying and detailing the minutiae of everyday life as objects engaging in small, epiphanic events. In contrast to most puppet makers, the Quays have a tendency to intentionally expose what lies beneath the surface: "Sometimes we do, and when we do that, it's also because you know you want them at that point, that they are puppets, but you go beyond that; then you can reveal that they are puppets."⁶⁷ This self-reflexive gesture also enhances the automaton-like quality. Whilst this incites a momentary break in the fictional world, it corresponds to Schulz's world in which

Demiurge, that great master and artist, made matter invisible, made it disappear under the surface of life. We, on the contrary, love its creaking, its resistance, its clumsiness. We like to see behind each gesture, behind each move, its inertia, its heavy effort, its bearlike awkwardness."⁶⁸

The Quays predilection for rootless, abandoned materials, continue traditions of Duchamp's 'bachelor machines' and readymades and Surrealism's 'exquisite corpses'.

⁶⁶ This movement was inspired by the Quay Brothers' observation of an aquatic salamander called the axolotl. See Quay, Stephen and Timothy Quay, "A Quay Brothers Dictionary", in Brook, 2006.

⁶⁷ Quay Brothers interview, 1992.

⁶⁸ Schulz, 1977, p. 61-62.

Their use of dead matter that mocks human form and foregrounds the material's autonomy all seems intertwined in the challenge to animate and sensualise deadness. Conjuring this world means exposing matter's 'bear-like awkwardness', Schulz's *generatio aequivoca*, an uncanny variation of automata, silently performing materials manipulated and animated by the hands of their makers. A sentience, an appurtenance of life is evoked by the puppet's physical manipulation between frames. Again we can take a cue from Schulz's "Treatise on Tailor's Dummies":

"Can you understand" asked my father, "the deep meaning of that weakness, that passion for colored tissue, for papier-mâché, for distemper, for oakum and sawdust? This is," he continued with a pained smile, "the proof of our love for matter as such, for its fluffiness or porosity, for its unique mystical consistency."⁶⁹

In Street of Crocodiles, stodgy, thick dust becomes a revelation when the camera rests upon it, or sand comes to life, flitting and pulsing, sand beetles buried in sand struggling beneath the surface on their backs with legs kicking, creating exquisite jumpy pools of insect life struggle (one of three shots filmed close to real time'. In an uncanny reversal of disconcerting density, there is an understanding of what it is to be trapped in a sawdust and cloth physicality and to be privy to its sinister and sensual potential.

In a previous chapter I described the usefulness of Joyce's portmanteau words with reference to Fritz Senn's concept of dislocation. I now want to bring this to bear on the manner in which the Quays construct their puppets, but I will use specific concepts of cinematic metaphor to transcribe dislocation into the contexts of the Quays' puppet animation. The pronounced artifice of the Quays' *mise-en-scène* relaxes expectations of a cinematic equivalent of human life form, and metaphor is one way to approach the 'otherness' of the objects. The tailor's assistants in Street of Crocodiles are a good example of this: the dolls' heads were found in London's Covent Garden market, the torsos constructed around a metal armature, the lower part of them a box-formed wooden skirt on concealed wheels. In a thorough analysis of cinematic metaphor, Trevor Whittock describes related forms found in cinema, including epiphor, juxtaposition, metonymy, synecdochy, objective correlative,

⁶⁹ Ibid.

distortion, rule disruption and chiming.⁷⁰ An important point is brought up by Whittock regarding the relations between various tropes, or metaphorical devices:

They function in relation to one another and to other elements in the work, which brings me to a fundamental point. In art, figurative meanings coalesce to form new constellations; patterns amalgamate to create larger structures; constituent parts are ever-combining into significant wholes. Metaphor is not only an element in this process: The very process itself is one of metaphorical transformations.⁷¹

These parts, that I will describe in more detail below, are the root of the sensation of apprehension, and it is the viewers' co-creational, dislocutional development of increasingly coherent patterns—in the narrative, metonymy, the mise en scene, the undercurrent life of the realm—that intellectual apprehension gives way to a pleasure of emotional comprehension. Thus understood, cinematic metaphors are part of the greater process of transformation, a process is driven by the reader's own powers of imagination which the author feeds with certain related tropes. I suggested the viewer of the Quay Brothers' films, like a reader of Ulysses, is forced to participate in the creation of the new meanings. Besides stylistic and linguistic innovation and the move inwards to the protagonist's mind, in his later works, the portmanteau word, another form of metaphor, takes on the status of a character, in analogy, puppets like the Tailor's Assistants are sculptural portmanteaus.

At this point it is relevant to recall that at the time of making Street of Crocodiles, the Quays were frequently referred to by their critics as surrealists. Robert Short suggests the Surrealists were more concerned with technique and style and that they "propose analogical thinking which can permit the reclassification of experience in an emotional and intuitive way. They claim that the poetic analogy has the power to reveal the principle of identity between the human mind and the exterior universe".⁷² In Schulz's writings, this principle of identity is created by merging imagination and vitalist descriptions of the palpable world. The Quays transform Schulz's story into poetic analogies via imagery and sound using materials that stand comparison with ones Robert Short attributes to Surrealist concepts: "[t]he poetic or plastic image, especially when it brings together a pair of elements which reason would regard as having nothing in common, often generates a mysterious

⁷⁰ Whittock, 1990, p. 50.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 15. Author emphasis.

⁷² Short, Robert, cited in Bradbury, 1991, p. 302-3.

luminosity and appears to be inexplicably appropriate, even inevitable."⁷³ This notion of pairs of elements applies to some of what I call portmanteau puppets that prevail in the Quays' films. These are composite figures made of disparate materials that notionally have 'nothing in common' that, in their specific combinations, create a unique type of cinematic metaphor. This invites the viewer's analogical, cocreative complicity and is also partly responsible for inducing the pleasure of apprehension that is located between the intellectual certainty of the 'real' world and the counterpart intellectual uncertainty of the Quays' cosmogony.

Nöel Carroll's 2001 "A Note on film Metaphor" provides my concept of portmanteau puppets with an astonishingly convincing set of proposals. Referring to a range of examples, from Fritz Lang's Metropolis and Popeye cartoons, Carroll explains that homospatiality (elements co-present in the same figure)-- is a prerequisite for such visual metaphors as it "provides the means to link disparate categories in visual metaphors in ways that are functionally equivalent to the ways that disparate categories are linked grammatically in verbal metaphors".⁷⁴ Linking disparate categories in the same figure and image includes using materials from widely differing origins and materials. Examples of homospatiality in the Quays' puppets are the hand with a cuff of stringed beads with a key protruding from the back of the wrist (Stille Nacht III), Rehearsal's wire and plaster homunculus and the Tailor's assistants constructions: the category of 'human' and 'mechanical' are combined in a single figure. Another extremely apposite property Carroll elaborates on is 'physical noncompossibility', something that "is not physically compossible with the universe as we know it that muscles be anvils, that people be cassette recorders or that spies be foxes".⁷⁵ Carroll discusses drawn animation, but his concepts also work for puppet animation that animates objects from the phenomenal, physical world, disparate elements that can be fused together in composite figures. Carroll elaborates that homospatiality and noncompossibility can suggest identity "when they are visually incorporated or amalgamated into one spatially bounded homogeneous identity."⁷⁶ These combined parts result in an identity of the puppet, one that is complicit with Schulz's concept of the 'generatio aequivoca'. Many a Quay puppet: the Enkidou puppet of feathers, cloth and bones, the tailor's assistants torsos on wheeled wooden boxes, a watch lined with flesh-- and, indeed, many a puppet in other filmmakers' work--is noncompossible as an apparently living 'being' in the real

⁷³ Ibid., p. 302-3.

⁷⁴ Carroll, 2001, p. 214.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 213.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 213-214.

world, but it is possible to experience it as such in the animated realm. These three terms--visual metaphor, homospatiality and physical noncompossibility--are central to the spectator's acceptance and understanding of the Quay Brothers' cinematic 'world'.

Carroll names eleven prerequisites for a film metaphor that includes ones that must be in place for the spectator to engage with the kind of noncompossible film metaphor I am proposing for the Quays' puppets. Three of these are particularly relevant for my discussion here: that the filmmaker be aware that the image presented is of something physically noncompossible; that it is that the spectator believes that what is represented is intended to be physically noncompossible; that the filmmaker intends the presentation of noncompossible elements in a homospatially unified array will invite the viewer to explore how these categories illuminate each other so that they have heuristic value.⁷⁷ Because the composite objects are of inanimate matter and animated, the Quays are aware of presenting an noncompossible image, and for the same reason, the spectator also realises and accepts the second condition that the images are physically noncompossible, but they become credible "compossible entities in what might be called the world of the fiction or the world intended by the narrator."⁷⁸ The 'world' intended by Schulz is an animistic one, and the Quay Brothers' animation transposes these literary metaphors into cinematic ones that the viewer is complicit in cocreating them as viable, believable entities in the film's fiction: this is the dislocutory act performed that transforms the assemblage of disparate categories--in the Rehearsals for Extinct Anatomies puppet, tangled metal wire, a glass eye, plaster skull--into an inhabitant of the film's vitalist realm, shared with other metaphysical machines. As for the third condition, of filmmaker's intent, the Quays make a relevant statement about certain freedoms that come with using 'anonymous objects':

You accept their very physicalities palpably as objectified dream or as music, and it's at this point that you can convey compound zones, darker ranges, deeper possibilities as well as perpetuate other narratives, other secret liberties.⁷⁹

These 'compound zones' are the Quays' invitation to the spectator to explore the historical and aesthetic referents of the materials that perpetuate other narratives.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 217.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 216.

⁷⁹ Quay Brothers interview, 1992.

Carroll suggests that "metaphors interanimate the relations between classes or categories."⁸⁰ The Quays' noncompossible puppets literally interanimate between categories of literature, sculpture, commodities and cinema, between philosophical and perceptual categories of phenomenal and animistic 'worlds'. The next chapter takes cause with how this cinematic labyrinth is constructed and negotiated, by the camera, the puppets, and the viewer.

⁸⁰ Carroll, 2001, p. 219.

Chapter 7. Negotiating the Labyrinth

There is a range of influences and the stylistic proximities into which the Quays are brought by critics and curators with other filmmakers throughout histories of art to contemporary times that is wide-ranging in terms of decades. But in cinema this remains a small group of experimental and auteur filmmakers. Cineastes the Quays mention as having had a particular influence on them include Aleksandr Dovzhenko, Robert Bresson, Theodor Dreyer, Georges Franju, Andrei Tarkovsky and Aleksandr Sokurov. All of these filmmakers are noted for their unusual poetics of lighting, mise-en-scène and camera. The influences of Impressionist Cinema and especially Surrealism are evident in some of the early films--Nocturna Artificialia, The Cabinet of Jan Svankmajer and Street of Crocodiles--and they qualify as recent works in this tradition. The diagonally striped box the puppet holds in Street of Crocodiles was a small homage, a nod, to Luis Buñuel's Un Chien Andalou, a film that stimulated some incisive thoughts in the Quays early on:

[Un Chien Andalou] is one of the most powerful films we ever saw, and it's a short film, which proves you didn't need to do a feature film to astonish. It has a violent lyricism and the poetic images were wild, really attractive. It's just a layer, it's as much as you read anyone's work, it adds to the density of the material and it's not important to know, not at all. [The puppet] just has a box around his waist with a screw hanging out. It's better than a Gucci bag.¹

Yet they are not completely at ease with the surrealist attribute: "Of course we are familiar with surrealism, we know its history and its place, but the term can too often be used in a cavalier way, without acknowledgment of its real meaning . . . When it's used cautiously and intelligently it can be a very descriptive term, but we're weary of its over-use."² In their later films the emulation surrealism seems to have initially provoked in the Quays is less mannerist and references are much more of a literary and musical nature. The Quays explain what interests them aesthetically:

¹ Quay Brothers interview, 1992.

² Deussing, 1996.

[O]ur animation draws heavily on a very sophisticated visual language--a certain quality of lighting and decor, of stylized movement--which has a lot to do with Expressionism. But at the same time one could talk [of Buster] Keaton, or early Swedish or Danish cinema, all of which are crucial for us.³

Their works have also been compared to other contemporary filmmakers. One of these is Canadian director Guy Maddin, whose use of filter, monochrome film stock, intertitles and other silent film techniques give the films a decidedly post-modern feel. None of this is new--viewers familiar with the films will recognise the three directors' own knowledge and implementation of these techniques and it can also explain the cinephile nature of their audiences.

But like comparisons with David Lynch, these similarities rest within the works, evident in their response to Ryan Deussing who suggested aesthetic similarities between Maddin's Careful (1992) and Institute Benjamenta: "[T]he relation to Careful is purely fortuitous. We had never seen the film when we got started shooting, and [Maddin] had never read [Walser's] book. Somehow we do share the same iconography".⁴ The comparison and the shared iconographies originate in part in Maddin's fascination with the histories of silent cinema. His use of intertitles, black and white film stock, scratching the new stock to make it appear old and worn, and his fantastic mise-en-scène and unusual narratives includes him in the same continuum of filmmakers the Quay Brothers are part of. Maddin's characters in Careful, for instance, are distant and stilted, unemotional, much like puppets themselves. The era of film making which they mostly aligned themselves with is telling and reveals much of their own cinephile natures: "The whole history."⁵ They are regulars in the art house cinemas and have combed many histories of filmmaking; fine filaments find their way into their films.

Since leaving Philadelphia in 1969 a European aesthetic has beckoned the Quays into a mysterious locus of literary and poetic fragments, wisps of music, the play of light and morbid textures. Critic Jonathan Romney visited the shooting set of Institute Benjamenta and described Hampton Court House's atmosphere and twisted architectures as belonging to the "'fossilised phantom Europe that is the true location of the Quays' fictions".⁶ In interviews, the Quays readily cite animation filmmakers

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Quay Brothers interview, 1992.

⁶ Romney, 1995, p. 12.

who use techniques other than puppet animation as influences on their own works, including Valerian Borowczyk--who had a much stronger impact on the Quays than is usually attributed to him--Jan Lenica, Jerzy Kucia and Alexandre Alexeïeff (who made most of his French films with Claire Parker). These animators have certain formal and aesthetic affinities with the Quays in terms of creating moods using special lighting, camera styles or source materials. Borowczyk's earlier drawn animation films have anti-narrative structures and his graphic designs appealed to the Quays' illustration interests. Kucia's films are often black and white, and he is highly conscious of the enormous range of moods light affords, experimenting with lighting and movement. His sombre use of chiaroscuro, to the point sometimes that the image is almost entirely black for long sequences, is akin to the effects Alexeïeff and Parker achieved with the pinscreen technique in Night on Bald Mountain (1933). They used side lighting to create minute gradations in the shadows thrown by varying protrusion of pins out of his pinboard. Almost all of these artists originated from Eastern Europe and Russia, an influential locus the Quays acknowledge: "We're much more indebted to Russian and Polish animation from the turn of the [20th] century . . . we know that work very well. It's just that most other people don't."⁷

The Quays' poetic syntax requires viewers of their works to participate in the relationship between sound and image and are more invested in schemata building, if they are to find some sort of narrative or plot within the visual framework 'composed' around the musical scores. This is also apparent in a 1994 description of their working method:

We improvise enormously under the camera, and when we get [developed film] back, we know if things are working, and if it's not working we scrub the scene and we'll rethink it, but it's always a very organic process.⁸

While belonging to a particular community of experimental filmmakers, there is much that also makes the Quays distinct from a general classification as animation filmmakers within a puppet animation tradition. There is a complex stylistic methodology that persists throughout their work, one that is apparent in both their live-action and animation filmmaking. The majority of their cinematic works deliberately construct a spatial logic of direct connections between discontinuous

⁷ Dieckmann, 1988, p. 31.

⁸ Quay Brothers, in: Wright, 1994, p. 2.

spaces, creating a distinctly unique cinematic realm. The previous chapters 'Traversing the Esophagus' and 'Puppets and Metaphysical Machines' proposed aesthetic and literary contexts for and described aesthetic features of the Quays' sets and puppets. This chapter explores four distinctly cinematic formal and stylistic technical parameters and devices of their work that set these in motion--montage, lighting, lenses, camera techniques--that, to contradict Max Ernst, are indeed 'la colle qui fait la collage', the glue that makes the collage.⁹ As many later variations on these techniques originated in Street of Crocodiles, it will be used to provide the main examples of their cinematic poetics.

Violating Space: Montage and Disorientation

I will now tease out a montage system that transforms the Quays' sets and spaces into an intentional disorientation, a Joycean 'dislocation', that allows unconventional ways of seeing the 'world' populated by their puppets and metaphysical machines. Colleen Lamos regards these dislocations as failures and suggests "Senn argues that such failures are 'intrinsic' to the programmed 'malfunction' of the work. In his view, Ulysses both thematizes and performs the movement of erring".¹⁰ While I do not want to suggest that the Quay Brothers' films 'malfunction', I do want to use this concept of 'programmed malfunction' as it indicates the intentionality on the Quays' part to create a 'pleasurable confusion', a confusion that engages the viewer to be receptive to the other laws of the film's realm. The organisation of shots further enhances the complexity of the sets and the noncompossible forms within the images--the puppets and set fragments that are "imaginary, improbable or dispossessed of their real former functions".¹¹ The Quays fantastic 'machines' and portmanteau puppets are already isolated metaphors in both the single frame and the mise-en-scène, and their juxtaposition with other shots creates a dense, intellectual challenge, that originates in redressing our conceived notions of continuity, spatial coherence and narrative.

Familiar concepts of montage are not easily applied to most animated films because of their inherent differences from live action films. Editing and montage of live action films are, in the primary definition, attempts, post hoc, to refine the narrative coherence and continuity of a film, and to remove unwanted or irrelevant material. 2D animation can take great liberties with these systems, and for most

⁹ Matthews, 1986, p. 33.

¹⁰ Lamos, 1998, p. 20.

¹¹ Quay Brothers, 1986, p. 1.

conventional forms of animated film, these problems are avoided during production planning in storyboarding and design before the film is shot frame by frame. Even in some of the most abstract films, animation can provide spatial and temporal cues to create a coherent sense of psychological space, even if that 'space' has a completely unfamiliar set of rules. In puppet animation, however, rules of space are more rigid, since the space we see is three-dimensional, extant and has more correspondences with our own perception, expectation and experience of space. Because puppet animation is a photographic representation of objects in space, and because this is not abstracted (distinct from two-dimensional animation, usually a graphic or painterly representation of space and materials), it shares some formal features with live-action film. Karel Reisz describes a montage sequence as "the quick impressionistic sequence of disconnected images, usually linked by dissolves, superimpositions or wipes, and used to convey the passage of time, changes of place, or any other scenes of transition."¹² Conventional use of the montage sequence is "a convenient way of presenting a series of facts which are necessary to the story but have little emotional significance...which would be cumbersome to show in full or which, though essential to the story, do not merit detailed treatment".¹³ The Quays' montage disrupts this by presenting a series of enigmas that, taken singly, have little emotional significance, but in their combination, suggest the vitalist urge of the films' location.

Montage is divisible into different formal categories: actual physical assemblage of film material; planning of shots; the organisation within the shots; the audio element and its composition, in relation to the images, to itself or to other non-musical tonal elements, and finally the relations between all these elements. A general distinction can be made between two basic forms of montage; narrative montage (similar to North American continuity cutting); and expressive montage, associated with the Russian formalists and roughly divisible into the theories of Vsevolod Pudovkin - the principle of film construction or linkage--and of Sergei Eisenstein. Besides the physical cutting and editing of film stock, James Monaco's basic definition of montage offers two more variations¹⁴:

1. The dialectical process of creating a new meaning out of the original two meanings of directly connected shots
2. The montage sequence, in which a number of short shots are combined to present a great deal of information in a relatively short time.

¹² Reisz, 1991, p. 112.

¹³ Ibid., p. 113.

¹⁴ Monaco, 1977, p. 183.

These definitions include constructivist montage concepts as well as Eisenstein's theories of montage of attractions and intellectual montage that are more useful for my purposes because they offer alternatives to the linearity of narrative construction. Reisz describes the distinction for Eisenstein between narrative and storytelling: "'While the conventional film directs emotions,' he wrote, '[intellectual montage] suggests an opportunity to direct the whole thought process as well'¹⁵".¹⁶ As the Quay's films are not structured using clear narrative form or causal linking, directing the thought process is a way to support the viewer's heuristic engagement. The sequence analyses of Street of Crocodiles I undertake are indicative and exemplary for a system that is used in their other films. They reveal that the Quays' challenge to viewers to orient themselves in the film's disjunctive, yet conjoined spaces is to a degree intentional; they partially wanted that "the geographies be rather blurred and indefinite--and at the same time they are so concrete."¹⁷ One is often lost in the labyrinths their films constructs, and the sense of disorientation intensifies during extended montage sequences. While the Quays do make use of some structures and narrative editing conventions of fictional realism, on closer scrutiny it becomes apparent how intricate their film grammar is within the contexts of cinematic montage. This montage is created by a typology of dialectical pairs constructed with mise-en-scène, editing and montage techniques specific to the Quays' style of experimental narrative strategies:

1. Continuity and spatial connectedness--discontinuity and disconnectedness;
2. Progressive and retroactive shooting;
3. Point of view structures and orientation--unmotivated montage point of view and disorientation.

These are complicit in a mix of conventional and non-conventional editing techniques. Yet the Quays' originality lies in specific technical and montage techniques that construct their poetics of a dislocutory spatial logic of direct connection between discontinuous spaces.

Street of Crocodiles is set of short and long montage sequences that visually interprets descriptive moments from Schulz's text and interspersed with scenes of narrative continuity that are usually centred around interaction between puppets.

¹⁵ Eisenstein, 1977, p. 62.

¹⁶ Reisz, 1991, p. 36.

¹⁷ Atkinson, 1994, p. 13.

The viewer is taken on a trajectory through many of the streets, corners and hidden rooms and 'theatres' that is constructed using point of view and montage to create the 'world' of the film. The Quays elaborate on how they construct space in two ways: on the one hand, using classic continuity principles, and on the other, by undermining these, in other words, via a dialectics of continuity and spatial connectedness - discontinuity and disconnectedness:

In order to violate space you have to know how to maintain space. In a way it is judiciously playing between the two extremes; how much information and what to give, and then deny. Continuity can maintain space, and also can rupture space. If a puppet turns and looks, you then pan to reveal that his space is connected to what he is looking at; that maintains the space. If you do a cutaway shot, and he looks at another space, you're securing space. We try to maintain space by looks--we always deal with the person looking.¹⁸

This ability to violate space comes from their understanding of how to use montage to undermine spatial logic of securing space, and the rupturing of space occurs in discontinuous editing retroactive shooting and unmotivated montage. The Quays began exploring these restrictions very early in their filmmaking: "When we did This Unnameable Little Broom, we built just one little set, but in this sense it gave us the greatest freedom, because we violated the space the most, by creating a black void around it."¹⁹

Street of Crocodiles has scenes that use a dialectic of progressive and retroactive shooting, whereby the latter reverses expository conventions of narrative continuity editing. These create disorienting effects that cue the viewer to understand how the conventional use of continuity is transgressed. The Quays call a montage technique they use to incite a sense of recognition or previous knowledge "retroactive cutting". It reverses the convention of commencing with a long shot followed by a close-up that explains by initially providing more information, then shifts to emphasise an element within that shot.

You see something that would only be revealed later. The cut, as it comes up, makes you think--'that doesn't help'. So we like to go the opposite

¹⁸ Quay Brothers interview, 1992.

¹⁹ Ibid.

way, do the close-up, where you feel disorganised, so you come back and see an arm.²⁰

The arm, in this case, is the scene where Bruno touches the tangled filament. While the live-action exposition does partially adhere to conventions of the establishing shot of camera angle, eyeline matches and varying shot size, retroactive cutting is also used, beginning with close-ups of a picture and the actor's face, and progressing to a long shot of the entire room. In 4:40-5:02, retroactive cutting begins with an extreme close-up shows screws unscrewing themselves from a floor shot with extremely shallow focus that leaves front and back of the horizontal plane out of focus as other screws enter frame left and roll off-screen right. This is followed by a hard cut to a long shot of the 'Zone', the monkey with cymbals in a window display flanked by two other shop windows, and the screws, now much smaller, roll into the set from left of frame. This 'retroactive cutting' commences in a hermetic ambiguous space that is then revealed to be the 'Zone'. This principle is also used in the film's only other live-action sequence, a closeup of an uncanny, erotic movement of a puppet's hand caressing its own breast (all the more uncanny as it is shot in live-action) done by one of the Quays hands out of frame directionally pushing the rubber arm, that pulls back to reveal the puppet's malevolent, carnevalesque face (15:26-15:29). Similarly, the animated realm within the 'Wooden Esophagus' is introduced in a close-up not balanced by a long shot or another form of spatial orientation until the third entry of the camera into the realm. This 'part-to-whole' metonymic strategy is also disorienting and creates an apprehensive emotional mood. Combined with changes in depth of focus, reversed from deep to shallow focus, the objects within the realm control the viewer's perception of them. But because such montage sequences are not preceded by a point of view shot of a subject, this disorientation is not attributed to anything or anyone within the diegesis.

The Quays discovered another innovative use of reverse shooting to express the transitional properties of Schulz's world of matter. The last sequence of the film is composed of relatively long shots, beginning with a hard cut after two fast pans that transport us out of the puppet's subjective realm. 'Bruno's' entry to and exit from the realm of the Street of Crocodiles both take place in the spaces introduced at the beginning of the film where we first see the puppet in the 'Wooden Esophagus' antechamber. The film is bracketed by these two sequences where he touches a piece

²⁰ Atkinson, 1994, p. 13.

of string that, in the first sequence (2:49-3:00), unravels and in the second (18:45-18:54), becomes entangled again, i.e. time is set free and then frozen again. These sequences are central to understanding how the Quays conceptualised the 'Zone':

We were trying there for something that Schulz had mentioned when he talked about those moments in time. It was the idea that when the puppet puts his hand on the cord, on the strings--and halts time. In a way, he brings everything to a halt in the zone. It is something we never brought off, because what we really wanted was that it would go in reverse, and time would flow back the other way, things would go back to their state prior to their decay and to their extinction. So we were trying to send everything flowing in the other direction.²¹

A successful example of this 'other direction' is the 'Metaphysical Museum' montage sequence with scenes shot in reverse (8:59-11:42): a puddle of water 'grows' into an ice cube, or a dandelion clock reassembles itself, returning to their states 'prior to decay', creating scenes that express the laws of Schulz's world. And in the final scene, the sense of closure and return to a space familiar from the beginning of the film is unsettled by a coloured cloth around the puppet's neck which was draped around him in a previous scene in the Tailor's back room, erasing the demarcations between hallucination, dreams and reality, mapping the labyrinth of the puppet's (and Schulz's) dream world. The coloured animated world then fades to monochrome as the puppet himself freezes, immobile, looking up and the blended-in text postscript to the film, accompanied by a voiceover in Polish, describing the dereliction of the Street of Crocodiles.

Street of Crocodiles systemised dislocation is a working method that uses montage sequences to express ordering of space and location of objects within the created realm. These are created using a dialectics of point of view structures and orientation and unmotivated montage point of view and disorientation. If we recall the collage concept the Quays used in their set design, part of the aim was to develop a confusion: "And that confusion we immediately felt was a pleasure, and that in order to be lost, you had to make it confusing."²² The pleasure of this confusion is the sense of apprehension, of seeing what one does not yet fully apprehend, and the anticipation of discovery and comprehension. Using what I call unmotivated

²¹ Quay Brothers interview, 1996

²² Ibid.

montage, this 'lostness' is created by the Quays' arrangement montage sequences that bundle disconnected objects in a shared, yet non-connected space without invoking a passage of time, change of place or transition. An example of this is the 'Metaphysical Museum' sequence (10:21-11:30) and thereafter when the 'Bruno' puppet is suddenly located in the Hall of Mirrors (11:58-13:00). It is not clear how these spaces are related, nor how the puppet moves between them, or who or what is doing the looking. In a dialectic to Reisz's description of the motivation for a montage sequence, it is exactly the elements of little emotional significance--the machines, the dust--that are central to these sequences. In the lingering close-ups, they become heroic, even gargantuan.

The point of view in *Street of Crocodiles* is often that of the camera itself, which the Quays tellingly call "the third puppet"²³ that is the point of view of the Metaphysical machines and the watchful presence of the vitalist undercurrent. But there is also a permanent doubling of point of view. The camera's point-of-view is always also that of the director--but in a directly active sense, since, the animator determines not only formal parameters but also controls the inter-frame adjustments of the puppets that result in movement, character and 'acting'. This is another example of Mitry's discussion of a character's located psychology and my assertion that, unlike an actor, a puppet can neither be disassociated from creative imagination nor have a fully independent existence. Regardless of how much control a director will try to have over his or her actor's movements, actors are much more the 'possessors' of a point-of-view--but puppets' actions and gaze structures are entirely created and determined by the animator. When a puppet looks off-screen or there is a match cut to what it is looking at, this calls attention to a much greater degree to the intention (and the actual action of moving the puppet) of the person animating the figure. This kind of point-of-view is much more mediated than in live action, because whether we have an omniscient or subjective point-of-view we are constantly aware of the animator's creation of the 'world' we see.

A number of shots that use unmotivated montage seem neither to have a subjective or an objective point of view, another grammatical element particular to the Quays. Burch offers a cue: "Still other possibilities can result from the non-resolution of . . . open matches, films that would have this very ambiguity as their basis, films in which the viewer's sense of 'real' space would be constantly subverted, films in which he could never orient himself."²⁴ Most of the shots of the

²³ Atkinson, 1994, p. 37.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 13.

'metaphysical machines' are deliberately unresolved or are unmotivated by conventional point-of-view structures and I suggest this unmotivated point of view is that of the animistic, metaphysical machines. An instance of this is in the 'Watch Death' montage sequence in which screws pierce and crack a flesh-filled pocket watch. The sequence is preceded by a shot of the monkey banging his cymbals--we haven't seen the watch before, and we don't see it again. Exceptions to this are in the sequences where they are eyeline matches with 'Bruno', for instance, when he is looking around at the shop windows in the 'Zone', and almost all the shots and scenes where he appears are constructed by his point of view: negotiating windows and passages or watching through a small window--another of the mysterious Bachelardian drawers, openings, and holes in the wall which inform the architecture of many a Quay film. But many other sequences don't provide this orientation and leave an ambiguity of point-of-view that creates emotional curiosity, tension and apprehension in the viewer. In another example, the 'Wooden Esophagus Antechamber' they undermine space by violating point of view systems (3:36-3:48). In the Antechamber, 'Bruno' hears footsteps, looks up through the roof and through his point of view we see the Boy running on a diagonal plane above him, that this seems to be a reflection of him running on the ground. The physical illogic of this scene confuses the viewer because the point of view is suddenly from above and mismatched on a cut from 'Bruno's' direction of looking. Burch suggests that "'mismatches' in screen direction are a valid technique only when the accompanying sense of disorientation results in a perceptible structure."²⁵ This scene doesn't result in an immediate perceptible spatial organisation, yet the angular set design and angled point of view helps the viewer understand that this realm obeys different laws than the extant world. On the suggestion that disorientation is an aim in the films' spatial constructions, the Quays response:

Oh yes, intensely. But it's not daunting. It is a provocation, and you align yourself with that, rather than 'I'm not going in here...'. But it really is true about the whole idea of the pleasure in disorientation. Some people have pleasure in disorientation, others intensely think: 'Why are you doing this to me? You have no right to'.²⁶

²⁵ Burch, 1981, p. 44.

²⁶ Quay Brothers interview, 1996.

They also justify giving this kind of uncertainty to their audiences, and point out the difference between this and guided cinematic forms of suspense that follow Hollywood conventions, mentioning the films of Alfred Hitchcock and Howard Hawks "where [the audience] know they're going to get something. This is a different kind [of suspense]. This allows them to be really lost, to join in with being lost without being lost."²⁷ This contradiction, of 'being lost without being lost' is a prominent dialectic in their montage system.

This lostness is apparent in the long, dense and associative 'Metaphysical Museum' montage sequence. Following a short sequence of hard cuts that confirm 'Bruno' in a new diegetic space, a fade-in to an image is immediately followed by a fade-out. This cuts to a framed close-up shot of the puppet identical to two later shots suggesting, in conventional terms, a flashback, dream or memory, and functioning as a transition to the following sequence. Objects and mise-en-scène elements that have been scattered throughout the film are brought into a shared context. Bruno is drawn to the flickering light of a small, dust encrusted window. Through a small opening, images of pulleys, wires, ice cubes and dandelion clocks keep the puppet's gaze imprisoned. He appears three times in extreme close-up in a POV shot of the side of his face as he looks through the window, shot from a camera position outside the theatre of objects. This is different from the shot-countershot between his gaze and the objects' location and during this time this montage sequence is composed mainly of fades and fast pans, enhanced with a technical, self-reflexive animation 'sub-text' (water forming into an ice cube, desiccated dandelion clocks reassembling themselves to gossamer globes). All hard cuts involve our seeing the puppet and the objects from his point-of-view, fades and fast pan shifts are assigned to the objects that we assume are in his field of sight. Yet repetitions, eyeline matches, and cross-cutting of previous images with new images and with close-ups of the puppet suggest a new set of relations which is extremely difficult to disentangle in the short time period in which they are projected. For instance, there is a long shot of Bruno seen through an opening--is Bruno watching himself? These seem to be examples of what the Quays propose, that "there could also be analogic spaces, created in the editing process, or abstract spaces, created by massive close-ups and deficient depths of focus--by violations of scale."²⁸ Some transitions are eyeline matches from Bruno's POV through the peephole, others are in spaces that we have seen before, and, as the spatial relations of the 'Zone' in which Bruno is

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Nichols Goodeve, 1996, p. 84.

standing have been explained, they would be impossible for his eye to see from his position. These 'analogic spaces' are also created in other sequences sharing similar montage and camera techniques (2:11-2:29, 6:45-7:00, 9:37-9:57) all seem to be representing subjective states of mind, or, perhaps more so, they represent the 'laws' of the film's world. Their enigmatic films leave viewers with multiple choices, differing degrees of 'lostness' and disorientation, with the accompanying degrees of pleasurable apprehension. It is possible to simply enjoy the flow of images, or try to find meaning or a schemata that works to fill in what seem to be narrative ellipses, in other words, try to understand the Quays' own dense form of intellectual montage based on intuition and displacement, itself enclosed within the paradox of cinematic illusion.

Reflecting on tracking and craning movements, reverse angles, focus pull, Keith Griffiths regards Street of Crocodiles as "one of the first 'trick films', if you like, which was shot exactly like live action. . . . the whole thing is constructed in conventional live action film form."²⁹ Yet the Quay Brothers' films have a singular aesthetic and montage technique distinct from live-action and 2D animation that, while drawing on live-action conventions, also exploits technical properties of animation to exploit and expand the film language of formal live-action techniques of lighting, lenses, shot transitions and montage. Responding to the suggestion that their filming is like live-action, the Quays propose their work in film:

has more to do with creating a kind of liquid space articulated by very precise mise-en-scène: in short, a choreography of rhythms, ratios, gestures and counterpoints . . . and it's this fluidity of space via these decors (and the montage!) that they defy their artificiality because you sense they are instantly assured of their "otherness."³⁰

Their systematic dialectics of montage reveals how carefully constructed the spaces are and enables a particular deconstruction of space that creates the 'otherness', the temporal and spatial world of Street of Crocodiles and other films. Their statement also statement underpins the musical aesthetics at work, the invisible but inseparable partner in the choreography of light, lenses, camera and rhythms.

Epiphanies of Light

²⁹ Griffiths interview, November 2003.

³⁰ Quay Brothers, 1986, p. 2.

If we can isolate one device of the Quay Brothers' films that has consistently developed throughout their later work, it must be the animation of light. These technical features of lighting bring the formal elements of the puppets and sets to life in an unusual way. Throughout Street of Crocodiles, objects and spaces are revealed and occluded, bloom and expire, in the light and shadows that shift and change intensities. Chiaroscuro lighting, mirrors and reflections develop a spatial organisation, and sometimes disorientation, contributing significantly to the mood of the films. It is light that seems to be the strongest transformation of graphic concepts in the film--the chiaroscuro that is one of their trademark devices. Light, both animated and as a technical parameter, reveals the objects, guides us through the passages and brings the objects to life. Intensities and qualities of light in the films varies and are determined choices of film stock (black and white or colour), lens and filters used, materials and colour saturation in set design, and glass and mirrors that contribute to lighting effects. In the context of a query relating to his love of taxonomy and classification, in an interview, Deleuze discusses his own particular engagement with this formal element of cinema that addresses its enormous range of possibilities:

For example, I'm attempting a classification of light in cinema. Here is light as an impassive milieu whose composition creates white, a kind of Newtonian light that you find in American cinema and maybe in another way in Antonioni. There is the light of Goethe [la lumière goethéenne], which acts as an indivisible force that clashes with shadows and draws things out of it . . . Yet another light stands out for its encounter with white, rather than shadows, this time a white of principal opacity (that's another quality of Goethe that occurs in the films of von Sternberg). There is also a light that doesn't stand out for its composition or its kind of encounter but because of its alternation, by its production of lunar figures (this is the light of the prewar French school, notably Epstein and Grémillon, perhaps Rivette today . . .). This list shouldn't stop here because it's always possible to create new events of light . . . ³¹

Street of Crocodiles displays an astonishing play with light and shadow, and in some shots and scenes, light becomes an actant; its animated activity is instigated by the

³¹ Deleuze, in Flaxman, 2000, p. 368.

Quays' manipulations and stop-motion filming of it. It flickers, travels across a wall, is reflected from a mirror, it pushes its way through mottled glass, manipulated in ways impossible to achieve in live action filmmaking. The Quays create new events of light--explorations in Street of Crocodiles that anticipate innovations in the Stille Nacht shorts, Institute Benjamenta and In Absentia.

While lighting design varies from film to film, an indicative typology of specific lighting effects and manipulations includes chiaroscuro, multiplication of light and animated light. None of these are exclusive to any one film: for instance, the two distinct sets in Rehearsals for Extinct Anatomies are formally and aesthetically defined by extremes of light. One of them is room with a sombre mood and muted colours, while the other is saturated with high key lighting that makes use of bright fill light floods a mainly white enclosed space. This second type of lighting is rather uncommon in the Quay Brothers films, and it has been used mainly for the artist documentaries, De Artificiali Perspectiva, or Anamorphosis (1991), and some scenes in the live action features, and it is a full-fledged protagonist in In Absentia. Lighting effects in many of the later films are familiar from Nocturna Artificialia's lighting design, in that they are heavily reliant on the use of low-key and chiaroscuro lighting and diffuse, carefully placed key lights that reveal or dim our view of objects and that connecting or isolate the film's architectural spaces. As well, the positioning of objects and puppets behind windows and in glass cases heightens the hermetic mood of a number of scenes. The light rarely intrudes enough for us to really see what is behind these windows, themselves more often than not with a mottled surface of dust and grime. Colours appear darkened, muted, and the passageways, interiors and even forest settings are usually lit with a single key light and have additional subdued lighting that reduces shadows and creates a diversity of chiaroscuro that is a distinct type in their lighting typology. In Street of Crocodiles, these range from a moody half-visible background with the pulleys and wires that travel into darkness, the underlit monkey in the smeared shop window that becomes discernible only when it begins to move, to the cheerful scene with a puppet made of light bulbs and glass that takes advantage of reflective surfaces to enhance and multiply light sources. The 'Watch Death' scene is one of the few scenes that uses close to high key lighting is when the watch pocket face is invaded by screws.

The lighting has a narrative function not only in terms of revealing what we see, but especially determining when we see it. When asked to what degree they intend to obscure and occlude vision, the Quays' response is indicative of the central role lighting plays in their work:

[It is about] multiplying [light] and frustrating a rationality. The rational mind would probably try to find a way out of a situation like that, and others would say "I like it like that, I like being confused, I like the pleasure of being confused".³²

The earlier discussion of montage confirms that the confusion they create using lighting is part of an aesthetic programme of disorientation. As a type of light, the multiplication of light is often created using lighting and reflections. This is most prominent in the display cases for the metaphysical machines, windows in the 'Zone' that contain the musty world of the monkey with cymbals, the stack of boxes, the vomiting man and the rubber band machine, and it is also used in both the window into the montage sequence with dandelions and ice cubes and the sequence where Bruno finds himself in the Hall of Mirrors. Reflections play with our expectations of off-screen space and depth of field, and glass panes positioned throughout the sets have a double function of transparency and light reflection. The Quays use light redirected by mirrors as a key spatial structuring component to disorient: "[in Street of Crocodiles] you don't know if you are seeing through it or if you are seeing behind you, in the rear view mirror, or something. It's like looking back in infinity. It's a hall of mirrors."³³ Two scenes in which the Boy uses a hand mirror to reflect light were based on one of the Quays' 8mm 'diaries'. They had filmed a youth in Wroclaw who was playing with a mirror and its reflection. An example of this is the 'Imp and Mirror' scene with the Boy leaning languorously against a wall, one shoulder dropped, an imp with his hand in his pocket. In his other hand he holds a small mirror. Without looking at it he bends his wrist slightly, and a beam of light reflects off the mirror. He shifts the mirror's position at different angles, sending a jagged, unruly flash of light to various corners of the 'Zone'. The light dances across the prone form of an anthropomorphic figure made of light bulbs. The light 'animates' it, brings it to life and it sets busily to polishing something. Cut to a murky window. The light flashes across it, permeating only slightly into the darkness behind, revealing a stuffed monkey puppet with cymbals. The light causes it to jerk into play, banging its cymbals so fast they blur.

³² Quay Brothers interview, 1996.

³³ Ibid.

In the second scene (7:35-7:37), the reflected beam settles on a window and reflects onto Bruno's face. The Quays intended him to see "the light ricocheting and then heads off in that direction, as though in pursuit of this epiphany of light."³⁴

There were other discoveries of light. While building puppets for Street of Crocodiles, the light above the worktop shone through the Tailor's assistants' translucent porcelain heads. The unexpected top-lighting effect led them to experiment with cotton wool, filling the empty heads with it to create a diffuse glow when lit from above, making the whiteness of the porcelain and the empty eye sockets even more stark.³⁵ According to the Quays, the work with lighting and reflections required especial care during shooting:

In Crocodiles there was so much glass on the set that you constantly had to duck, get out of frame because of our reflections. There is that one scene, where [a Tailor's assistant] is stroking the glove, where you see [a movement] in the glass, and one of us forgot to duck. And we were bare-chested, too, and it was really light. Usually we wear black, but it was such a stinking hot day, you just see this sort of boiling effect.³⁶

Reverse animation techniques were also useful in controlling light in very small detail. When filming a puppet that moves into a beam of light, they found it impossible that the light would convincingly reflect from the eye; they resolved this by starting shooting with the puppet in the light and animating the scene backwards: "We are always thinking in reverse how to animate him. We realised very quickly that we had to animate in reverse to hit the light."³⁷

Discussing Institute Benjamenta in an interview, the Quays said "To every space is allied its own quality of light, and this too should be a poetic conception. Light creates the essential Stimmung [mood], the metaphysical climate, those "thicknesses" in the space itself."³⁸ Quite by accident while shooting the animated sequences for the first feature, the Quays discovered another element of their light typology that became a central poetic concept for later films. Sitting in the studio, with one of the miniature sets there by chance, they became aware of sunlight entering in the space:

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Quay Brothers interview, 1992.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Quay Brothers interview, 1996.

³⁸ Nichols Goodeve, 1996, p. 84.

It was the epiphany of light--God said here's your moment. The first time we took the [single frame] trigger and counted one thousand, two thousand, three thousand, then the next day every five seconds, then every seven. In the end we just chose the take we felt was most liquid.³⁹

Shooting over three days, they had to work with the sun's trajectory that came in at the end of the day as it passed through a gap between two buildings, cut across the floor and climbed the walls. The Quays applied the aspect of control that animation allows to something that we cannot physically contain--elusive, stray, energy-laden beams of light. Animated sunlight also inspired lighting in the feature's live action sequences. Nichols Goodeve comments on Institute Benjamenta's stunning light design that is especially prominent in Lisa's sanctuary:

For Lisa, the Institute's instructress, the building is a realm of light. Light swells, advances, becomes like liquid myrrh, glows and invades her. At other times it may be a trapped, fetid, dead light, or an annihilating, corrosive light. What happens in the shadow, in the gray regions, also interests us--all that is elusive and fugitive, all that can only be said in those beautiful half-tones, or in whispers, in deep shade.⁴⁰

The discovery the twins made to animate sunlight was to have a significant formal impact on In Absentia, remarkable for its subtly innovative use of animated light--streams of it, shafts, beams, bright spots, liquid incandescence that moves through the puppet and full-scale sets, taking advantage of every opportunity to reflect off the many sheets and panes of glass. In the animated dream sequences, it is shattering, blinding, unpredictable. In the live action realm, it bathes the actress and spaces in a dim glow, occasionally increasing to the strength of the animated sequences (the live action sequences could not take advantage of the slow shooting speed that enabled the sunlight to 'burn' into the film stock). The animation allowed it to be mapped and controlled, directed across the objects and surfaces in the sets. The Quays had long been interested in light and reflections, and during production of In Absentia, there was another epiphany that strengthened the discovery of

³⁹ Quay Brothers interview 2003.

⁴⁰ Nichols Goodeve, 1996, 84.

animating sunlight they made while shooting the first feature. They described the work with light for In Absentia:

Stockhausen's music felt as if it was saturated in electricity, and consequently we decided to give the film a very particular type of lighting, almost divine. This way we shot almost all of the scenes with natural sunlight coming from the window in our studio, then utilizing mirrors and reflecting panels to sculpt the light according to the exigency of each scene. Being dependent on natural lighting tied us to meteorological conditions, hence we exploited the light quality which entered our studio from time to time to realize an animated sequence. Additionally we simulated the lighting phenomenon of the so-called 'heat lamp', which was in frequent use in many regions, to represent the mental landscape of the suffering protagonist.⁴¹

Again the fortuitous method the Quays tend to prefer became a well-organised obsession with capturing sunlight at every possible moment, even sleeping in the studio to catch the early light. It wasn't unencumbered sunlight that interested them:

It was the days that we thought were too cloudy which worked the best. The clouds made the light dance. Some of the patterns were mad. A lighting cameraman never could have created anything like that. What nature gives is an invitation.⁴²

Taking on this 'invitation' resulted in one of the most striking pieces of animated cinema. With In Absentia and other films, the Quay Brothers have contributed 'new events of light' to Deleuze's taxonomy. A combination of chiaroscuro lighting, multiplications of light and animated sunlight becomes a poetic strategy in later films.

Lenses and Depth of Field

Unlike the flat surfaces of 2D techniques that in most cases must create lens and lighting effects in the actual drawings, puppet animation can make use of the

⁴¹ Aita, 2001.

⁴² Ibid.

manifold possibilities of different camera lenses and lighting setups to alter the image. The Quays play with depth of field, perspective, soft focus and distorting lenses. In particular, their use of wide-angle and macro lenses makes objects appear further apart, distorted at edges, and distances between foreground and background planes appear greater. In a discussion of Stan Brakhage's concept of the 'untutored eye', William Wees extrapolates on camera lenses:

In fact, all parts of the camera, as well as the film that runs through it, are built-in averaging devices. Because they are made to serve the statistically average "normal eye" of optical physics, they are likely to be congenitally blind to much of what the "untutored eye" sees--unless their averaging effects can be cancelled.⁴³

The 'eyes' the Quays provide us with take advantage of the 'untutored eye'—through a vitalist, animistic, even Schulzian filter--and also force us to perceive objects and spaces much differently than our own eyes would allow. Focus pull is an in-camera transition that changes depth of field and can also be used as a montage element to confuse or define spatial coherence. It is mainly used by the Quays in point-of view shots, occasionally as a spatial transition. The Quays' use of and shifts in focal planes undermines the averaging effects of conventional lens usage and is one of the identifying devices in almost all of their films, especially Street of Crocodiles, Rehearsals for Extinct Anatomies, the Stille Nacht films, The Comb and In Absentia. These are compositionally motivated and activate the spectator to pay attention to spatial cues that the shifts in focal planes suggest. In her fascinating treatise on the olfactory haptic qualities of Institute Benjamenta, Marks comments on the Quay Brothers' short films:

Their animations work with small-scale models populated by small objects. Focal length and lens choice create a sense of space in which the most interesting events do not occur in human scale. The camera moves delicately among these tiny theatres, creating a point of view that seems to belong to one of the objects or something even smaller and more ambient--the point of view of dust, or of the air.⁴⁴

⁴³ Wees, 1992, p. 75.

⁴⁴ Marks, 2002, p. 131.

In Street of Crocodiles the focal plane shifts constantly, both guiding our attention and creating a sense of relationships between the objects (ice cubes, dandelion clocks). Discussing what she terms 'the anthropomorphic camera', Christine N. Brinckmann describes differences between the cinematic image and natural perception in terms of focus:

The unfocused filmic foreground can indeed be used for subjectification, as an indication that a fictional person sees an object beyond this zone. . . . Precisely the aberration from the usual composition of focused fore- and mid-ground serves here as a signal to perceive the image as anthropomorphic. It is more extreme when the focus is shifted during a shot.⁴⁵

The use of multiple focus pulls are made during different single-frame shooting result in shots that invite the viewer to see what 'Bruno' sees, and these are anthropomorphic images, yet there is also a sense that another point of view is implied. Another example of the Quays' unique use of focus and lenses is in the film's black and white exposition, intercut with a monochrome shot of wire mesh objects, dust, pulleys and a bowl filled with rusty screws. Besides suggesting 'the third puppet', the camera, such shots foreshadow the animated world to come, our introduction to the 'realm' of Schultz's world. Marks suggests that "[h]aptic looking tends to rest on the surface of its object rather than to plunge into depth, not to distinguish form so much as to discern texture. It is a labile, plastic sort of look, more inclined to move than focus."⁴⁶ Because of the use of macro lenses and the camera's slow shift between focal planes, in these and many other shots in the film our gaze lingers on these surfaces--the Quays lead our gaze as we caress this exquisite composition of poetic detritus with our eyes.

These kinds of shots and scenes have a significant function in our experience of the film's textures and objects and are also interruptive moments in its elliptical narrative. Costa suggests that "Their constant focus-games, these apparently chance camera movements that come to a halt and highlight absences or fragments or a seemingly irrelevant picture space involve the spectator in combat, but they irrevocably condemn him to defeat."⁴⁷ Using lenses to exaggerate the textures and emphasise tactile surfaces of objects from the physical world is utterly intentional

⁴⁵ Brinckmann, 1997, p. 280. Author translation.

⁴⁶ Marks, 2002, p. 8.

⁴⁷ Costa, 2001, p. 46.

and foregrounds the artistic motivation in the Quay Brothers' cinematic work. Marks suggests that "Haptic images do not invite identification with a figure so much as they encourage a bodily relationship between the viewer and the image."⁴⁸ We engage physically, sometimes synaesthetically with these fantastic images, feel and smell the dust, taste the acrid rusting metal, all of which are emotionally charged and sensualised by the accompanying music. The use of focus pull in the film can also effect an in-camera transition, such as at 1:37-1:46, 5:03-5:10 and 10:27-10:29. It changes depth of field and is used as a montage element within the frame to undermine or define spatial coherence. In Street of Crocodiles it is employed in a number of ways, mainly in point-of-view shots, and it is not used as a spatial transition. The focus pull is a dynamic use of shallow focus effects in the film that express the Quays preferred use of macro lenses for close-ups, another defamiliarising device used in the film. The extreme close-up draws our attention to the material reality of the textures and materials, and hence has a realistic motivation. The defamiliarising effect here is the extremely close visual confrontation with these materials, so much so that they become hyperreal, and take on monolithic, occasionally grotesque characteristics. The camera's lingering on objects with these attributes discreetly upsets the balance between nature, familiarity and scale, in that objects are foregrounded without explanation, without a contrived simile to a natural representation.

From Here to There: Frame, Shot, Camera and Transitions

The Quays have a log book from Street of Crocodiles that describes, in notes, drawings and sketches made during filming, the process for each shot in the film, how they animated sequences, lenses and F-stops used, lighting setups, calibration calculations and other technical information. Interesting is the fact that the data is recorded in the process of filming, as a technical record of what the Quays do as they go along. Regarding the traditional concept of storyboard or scenario, they state that "at most we have only a limited musical sense of its trajectory, and we tend to be permanently open to vast uncertainties, mistakes, disorientations as though lying in wait to trap the slightest fugitive encounter."⁴⁹ Street of Crocodiles' length of 20:30 is the result of shooting approximately 29,500 frames, almost all of which were shot in single frame except the live-action exposition and a few other brief shots. In film

⁴⁸ Marks, 2002, p. 3.

⁴⁹ Quay Brothers, 1986, p.2.

production a shot is defined as "one or more exposed frames in a series on a continuous length of film stock."⁵⁰ In live action film, the concept of a shot being a single frame is extremely rare, while it occurs more in experimental and structural film.⁵¹ Film analysis often uses single frames of shots to illustrate descriptions of a longer shot: Stam et al state that the shot itself can provide "an inordinate amount of information--a fact which becomes obvious in any attempt, as in a shot-by-shot analysis, to register in words the semantic wealth of even a single, relatively straightforward cinematic image."⁵² The Quays remark on the particular attention each frame can be given in single-frame shooting :

In a way [editing in animation] is even more crucial. Because you animate every single frame, you also respect every single frame. A camera man shooting just shoots material, tons of it, and then it comes to the editor, and he starts putting it together. But when you know you're shooting your own material and cutting your own material, you can see the 1/24th of a second.⁵³

The significance of every single frame exposes the intricacies the animated shot. The 'shot' takes on multiple meanings when discussing animation, if the end of the shot is defined by stopping the camera from shooting a continuous frame. In animation, this happens with every frame shot. It is of course possible to identify shots and sequences 'separated' using live-action transition conventions, such as fades, dissolves, wipes and hard cuts. Single frame shooting can emulate live action: although shot using single frames, the shots and scenes in the projected film seem to be shot in real time (albeit the 'time' of the film's specific world). A sequence of individual frames (shots) can be followed by a transition that separates them from the next 'shot' or sequence of single frame images. The cumulative 'shots then appear as a continuous shot if the image composition, movement, and sound track have a coherent flow.

The Quays' description of creating a shot makes it clear that animation single frame shooting does work with similar conventions as live action, but within much tighter temporal durations:

⁵⁰ Bordwell and Thompson, 1993, p. 247.

⁵¹ Examples include Alain Resnais' *L'année dernière à Marienbad* (*Last Year at Marienbad*), many of Paul Sharits' structural and flicker film experiments, and Robert Breer's collage film *Recreation* (1956-57)

⁵² Stam et. al., 1992, p. 34.

⁵³ Quay Brothers, 1986, p. 2.

You know that when you set up a shot that there's a beginning, a middle and an end. I don't think we say: this is going to be precisely thirty frames. We'll say, it only has to be around thirty frames, but once the animation starts, it might drift to forty, fifty frames. You have to take into consideration that if the puppet might suddenly go like this [gestures], and then he pauses and looks, you say, this might be a twenty frame hold or a thirty frame hold, and then he continues to look, and then you're up to fifty frames. You might cut it back to thirty frames, but you have to overshoot a little. You never know. You can cut where just two frames make all the difference.⁵⁴

These subtle adjustments of length and shot length describe one to two seconds of film and show the amount of control and nuance that is possible in single frame shooting. It is also important to bear in mind that the Quays aren't filming movement, but single frame still images. The grace, timing and character of their puppets lies in "seeing 1/24th of a second" and knowing how to make minute adjustments between frames that result in the graceful, choreographed movements of their puppets. The Quays make use of most shot sizes; the objects are shot in proportions and spatial relations that emulate a live-action realm, mainly structured by arrangements of long, medium and close-up shots (most close-ups and extreme closeups are reserved for the animated realm) connected by hard cut transitions (with some exceptional exceptions). Shot size can also function as a kind of pre-editing in the camera, setting up proportional and spatial relations between figures, objects and sets. Shot separation is then clearly marked by shifts in time and space, by actions and movement and by a causal chain of events requiring identifiable markers of recognition for audiences. Separation between individual shots can be determined by conventional transitions: hard cut, dissolve, fade out, fade in, wipes and other transitions include in-camera fade in, and fade-to-black. Street of Crocodiles has 225 discernable shots separated by transitions, and over the length of the film (1,230 seconds) there is a transition on average every 5.5 seconds.

The coordination of shot length, shot size and transition is especially revealed in the first minutes of the film. The live-action exposition in the theatre space is edited with hard cuts between close-up to medium and long shots that introduce and explicate the diegetic space of the scene. This sequence is 'interrupted' by two

⁵⁴ Quay Brothers interview, 1992.

separate short shots of metal objects in extreme close-up and cross-cutting between these and the live-action set anticipates the transition from live-action to the animation technique. First the camera descends into the 'Wooden Esophagus' and then a hard cut takes us back to the live action and a close-up of the actor letting a luminous gob of spit drop into the 'Wooden Esophagus'. On a hard cut, we enter the animated realm, following an animated simulacrum of the original spit which sets in 'motion' the machinery within the 'world' of the 'Wooden Esophagus', all shot in close-up. The interplay between 'outer' (live action) and 'inner' (animated) realms is insinuated by dense cross-cutting between man and puppet. The link to the 'outer' world is severed by the diegetic snip of a scissors that frees the puppet and a hard cut followed by a fade-in to an unfamiliar location with an unspecified point-of-view from above of Expressionistic diagonal roof elements and 'oversized' scissors is followed by two fast pans. After this interruption of continuous space, the Quays then proceed to reveal the animated realm with a fairly long sequence of eyeline matches and cross-cutting, establishing the spatial relations and the causality of the puppet's actions in the diegesis as he negotiates the Antechamber, touches the knot that unravels and sets the realm in motion, passes under the screen and enters the 'Zone'. The complex editing in these two montage sequences is composed of hard cuts that establish a certain spatial continuity between the shots and scenes. They are characteristic for other sequences throughout the film, and they also suggest relations between puppets, objects and spaces. The high shot frequency in the Quays' montage sequences contributes to creation and rupturing of space that will be discussed below.

Since animation is shot frame by frame, it is obvious that the camera must remain in a static position to avert apparent movement between individual frames that would result in a blurred or 'trembling' image. Yet camera movement during shooting can change composition, effect transitions between different settings, follow actions, suggest varying POV and so forth. In a subsection of The Language of New Media entitled "The Poetics of Navigation", Lev Manovich discusses how a number of films, including Street of Crocodiles, diverge from cinema's camera grammar and have their own systems:

In The [sic] Street of Crocodiles, the camera suddenly takes off, rapidly moving in a straight line parallel to an image plane, as though mounted on some robotic arm, and just as suddenly stops to frame a new corner of

the space. The logic of these movements is clearly non-human; this is the vision of some alien creature.⁵⁵

Manovich is describing single-frame shooting with a moving camera that allows other freedoms in creating transitions, and such camera movements must be painstakingly calibrated and synchronised with movement that is animated within the frame. The Quays' shooting methods are highly unusual in animation, in that they use calibrated tracking shots, animated pans and what appears to be a moving camera, a key innovative technique in their style of film making that appears in almost all their films.

The experience Manovich describes is an in-camera effect, an innovative transition that I call a fast track and the Quays call a 'whip' that they have used consistently since its first appearance in the opening shot of *Nocturna Artificialia* and is used over 40 times in *Street of Crocodiles*. The fast track has different dialectical functions in the film's montage but technically is the result of camera movement between single-frame shooting: the calibration of camera movement between individual shots is increased, producing a different effect than a live swish pan or simple accelerated dolly or tracking. The Quays propose that "whips connect a space, they don't or shouldn't disorient. They just get you there a bit more urgently."⁵⁶ While the fast track connects spaces, in most instances in the film it actually has a disorienting effect that, while does in fact 'get you there a bit more urgently', this urgency is one of the film's devices that needs to be understood in terms of intent. It means that original visual points of reference, blurred during the whip transition, are usually completely different once the camera comes to rest, insinuating a psychological shift as well, one that creates subjective point-of-view structures. This movement, originating from the non-human logic Manovich mentions, could also be comprehended as the point of view of one of the Quays' metaphysical machines that were described in Chapter 6.

The fast track is used in two variations. The fast track cut effects a subsequent shift to a new diegetic space that is created by the hard cut, and this is similar to live-action conventions. When projected, the fast track cut creates a disorienting, jerky camera movement that has a unique aesthetic and haptic quality: this is the dialectic of direct connection between discontinuous space. While the camera is being calibrated and shifted upwards (i.e. 1:07-1:19) there is an indiscernible hard cut

⁵⁵ Manovich, 2001, p. 262.

⁵⁶ Correspondence, 2003.

during this movement. When 'Bruno' is in the glass-roofed set, a similar effect happens (3:36), when the camera comes to rest on an image of the Boy running, who we see upside-down. The framed space is completely different to that at the outset of the fast track cut. Because it renders the 'continuous' shot as fragmented and spatially disjunctive, the viewer has difficulty reconstructing the spatial organisation between the two shots. The defamiliarising effect is compositionally motivated and melds two phenomenally independent spaces into a continuous perceptual flow. Thus, the fast track cut, because it is not the result of a perceivable cut, is neither a pan nor a clear transition. Because the visual result is not a convention of live-action film, it self-reflexively draws the viewer's attention to how animation's formal and technical means expand those of live-action cinema. In most cases, the fast track cut functions to disorient spatially, because although there is not a discernible cut, the spatial order and reference has changed after the camera comes to rest on an image. The lack of a full break in image, a hard cut that would be necessary to move between two spatially distinct spaces without shooting the temporal and spatial transition between them, results in a spatial, but not temporal, connection between the initial image and the final one. The lack of temporally 'correct' continuous space creates a disconnected, yet strangely coherent realm that seems to be free of established physical laws of 'reality'.

The second calibrated in-camera montage technique the Quays created is the fast track shift. In the fast track shift the spatial move between two distinct sets during camera movement is not interrupted by a cut, again creating direct connections between discontinuous spaces. However, it is temporally condensed by the calibration and the possibility in single-frame shooting to 'leave out' frames--and the 1/24 of a second each of these frames would record in live-action shooting as an equivalent temporal passage of time during the camera's movement. This unnatural speed of movement is distinctive from more familiar, 'invisible' camera movements that construct the fictional, spatial 'reality' of the narrative. The fast track shift is mainly used in a visually established and continuous diegetic space and functions to establish different types of transition both between the live-action and animated realm (with the Wooden Esophagus as passage between them) and in the animated realm. The lack of a full break between the two image spaces results in a visual elision that merges the initial location and the final one. This singular montage technique is not a live-action convention and possible only animation single-frame shooting. In Street of Crocodiles, the fast track shift is very quick and usually takes place over no more than a few individually shot and minutely calculated calibrated

frames. The Quays: "Mathematically, especially dealing with tracking shots; you're dealing with time and mathematics, with speed and mathematics."⁵⁷ The Quays' use of this technique contributes to the fluidity of space in their particular realms, simultaneously drawing attention to its fabrication. The semi-flicker effect and fast movement is a film grammar that cues the spectator to concentrate on planes of focus. It becomes almost physically impossible to visually locate and focus on an object that passes through the frame during the fast pan shift in order to implicate it (as it seems to suggest it should be) in the rest of the images. This deliberate method of avoiding continuous space and change of focal point in the fast track part of a cinematic grammar that helps their works achieve their cinematic power.

Another variation of calibration and tracking during shooting is also used within a shot, where the camera does not move horizontally, vertically or diagonally, but on a flat plane towards an object in the frame. This creates a change in the shot size during the camera's calibrated movement towards the object in the set. In The Cabinet of Jan Svankmajer, this effect is used with an Archimboldo portrait (2:56-2:57). In the same 'shot', over 36 frames, it takes us from a long shot of the room to a medium close-up of the portrait. During calibrated movements forward, the shot size changes as the camera approaches the portrait. In this 'jump cut' effect the individual images are blurry and appear to have multiples of the portrait on a single frame: this suggests that the shots were longer exposures and that perhaps the camera moved during the single exposure. Once the camera has made its approach, it pans down towards the top of a table as the Svankmajer puppet appears out of thin air during the pan. The effect in projection is indeed one of 'getting us there more urgently' and it does so in a staggered approach that has affinities with a jump cut but is a special effect of animation. As all objects in the frame are not animated, a continuous zoom or tracking shot would have been possible, but the effect would have been an abrupt aesthetic shift from the otherwise animated film. Costa: "What makes the Quays' films such a unique experience is not so much the animation of their characters, but the animation of this choreographic camera that subverts the conventional direction of the spectator's gaze, generating a formal tension without obvious referents."⁵⁸ This is further enhanced by the Quays' use of macro lenses that provide virtually no depth of field.

The Quays discovered a new animated effect when filming Rehearsals for Extinct Anatomies that would be used in the Stille Nacht films. Using a ping pong

⁵⁷ Quay Brothers interview, 1992.

⁵⁸ Costa, 2001, p. 46.

ball attached to a string and a camera set on pixilation speed of six frames a second, they hit the ball and turned on the camera. They describe how they discovered variations of this effect:

It creates the most mellifluous effect, and you get it straight through an arc. Mathematically, it was sheer luck, the ball moved back and forth in some kind of pattern. We did tests later and we couldn't do it. It's an optical effect. Serendipity. It was so beautiful, and amazing as it was in sync with the music. It was luck.⁵⁹

Many other objects were given similar treatment--the quill-holding hand at the beginning of the film, the kidney-shaped heart of another, balls and wires. Some of these effects are based on movements around a central axis: the eyeball of one puppet was animated as it spun around an invisible inserted central wire in its head, a ventilating fan turning on its axis. Another effect was used with a ball bounding up stairs that, swung between two points, was shot at a frequency so that it was captured at the end of each arc: one ball became two and appeared to be almost static. At some points in the film, an object is moved from side to side and the shot frequency doubles its appearance within the frame, as is the case with the wire homunculus, and the kidney-shaped heart.

The Quay Brothers' later works continue to refine Street of Crocodiles' parametric typologies of violating space, epiphanies of light, lenses (extreme close-ups, heavy use of macro lenses and depth of field) and frame, shot, camera and transitions (calibrated tracking shots, a choreographed camera, high shot frequencies and variances in single-frame shooting speeds). This choreography of images is incomplete without the final parameter--sound. In a discussion about Eisenstein's dialectic and polyphonic montage the Quays described their approach to this process:

You should create a new form, an idea that moves onwards, and every cut should propel that, or accelerate it . . . If you want to orchestrate five scenes, that's going to demand an even finer notion of what cutting can give you, and at the same time making it clear. They are musical scenes, and Eisenstein knew music really well.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Quay Brothers interview 2003.

⁶⁰ Quay Brothers interview, 1992.

In a context of the differences between verbal, graphic and pictorial surrealist endeavours, Matthews points out the visual image's lack of structural unification (in contrast to the grammatical structuring of verbal cadavres exquis); "When we face a pictorial cadavre exquis, our reaction to what constituent parts of the drawing have to show is very likely to be influenced by our impression of how presentation is made."⁶¹ Analogous to the concept of cadavres exquis in the creation and 'ordering' or choreography of these images or shots, a further, inseparable formal parameter influences the presentation and transforms the Quays' imagery into the finished experience of the film: music, sound and noise complete the interworking of the *mise-en-scène* with a minutely planned composition and arrangement of sound that ultimately performs the emotional experience of the films.

⁶¹ Matthews, 1986, p. 133.

Chapter 8. The Secret Scenario: Soundscapes

Music permeates the Quays' studio. The rafters and corners are imbued with compositions from Eastern European composers, madrigals, violin sonatas and avant-garde instrumentals, more contemporary minimalist jazz and short wave recordings from distant lands. There is so much music in fact that the small bathroom functions as a 'musithek', the walls lined with hundreds of music tapes whose replaced covers are embellished with their calligraphy and illustrations. Music is convoluted in discussions, gestures and replies. On the topic of music in a 1996 interview, the Quays regarded themselves as "failed composers. What we try to do is create a visualisation of musical space--we want you to hear with your eyes and see with your ears. It's like saying, What kind of decor, in what parallel world, would evoke that music?"¹ A feature that permeates almost all of their short films is the liaison of music world with objects and textures, the relationship between aural and visual is indeed a composition of carefully planned and executed movements, rhythms, proximities. The images gain a lyrical quality that is not only inspired by the music: they are complicit with it, and the emotional qualities ascribed to the abstractions of music become musical emotionality of the figures, via accompaniment, under- and overtones and counterpoint. The unique musicalised synthesis of image and sound, challenges the viewer--and listener--to engage in a different kind of audiovisual experience. The relationship comes to light in a complex, sound-driven orchestration of movements of camera, puppets (and people) and objects, a choreography between lighting, mise-en-scène, movement and sound track. This choreography is markedly distinct from the essentially descriptive or mimetic coordination of sound and image used in animation film (and comedy) vulgo 'mickey mousing', where the action is music-driven and synchronised to the musical movement. The Quays state "[i]ntuitively we're much more drawn to a cinematic mode where a secret, almost pathological drift can be ordained and pushed at a deep musical level, that this flux can be sustained at a kind of lyrical-prose level."² This deep musical level is at work in most of their films, including the early music documentaries.

One notable feature that runs throughout all the puppet animation films--exceptions being the animated documentaries--is the almost complete lack of spoken dialogue which, if on the sound track at all, is muffled or whispered so quietly as to

¹ Nichols Goodeve, 1996, p. 83.

² Quay Brothers, 1986, p. 1.

be unintelligible, even discordant, indicating only some obscure presence. This non-vococentricism is central to understanding the intention of sound's interplay in their formal parameters:

For us, dialogue is no more important than light or sound--it is one of the elements you can play with. The trouble is it is always the most obvious. In Hollywood, dialogue is pre-eminent; the script comes first--that gets the funding. And for us it is always the other way around, because we work with animation.³

This not only makes their work distinct from live-action dialogue-driven narrative. It sets the Quay Brothers apart from many animators damned to what they call the "ghetto-ized, anodyne cliché-ridden dosage of children's television, an absolute swamp of banality, where all the characters are inevitably docile bogus flunkies wrapped around well-known actor's voices."⁴ Free of dialogue, the nonverbal centrality of music brings the puppets and objects to life in the film's 'world' that is not bound to the narrative organising principle of the spoken word, its cultural specificity and its anthropocentricity, the absence of the latter being a key determinant for establishing the credibility of the realm's otherness. The Quays are emphatic about not using dialogue: "We don't want a voice. We could imagine almost inaudibly that a puppet could breathe, but his voicelessness demands and forces you to interpret rather than be supplied."⁵ Orienting by the films' nondiscursive soundscapes rather than a narrative primacy of vocal utterances that predominates in most conventional film, the viewer is offered much less guidance and ultimately more exegetic freedom that allows for a more idiosyncratic interpretation. There are exceptions: intermittent on The Comb's soundtrack, muted whispers and a voice are heard in varying level of intelligibility and pitch, but the language (possibly Polish) is garbled and has a musical rather than narrative function. This principle avoidance of dialogue is also evident in Institute Benjamenta. The Quays, not wanting to lose the feature's dream-like quality, opted for voice-overs for longer dialogue passages:

It gave us a lot more freedom than having a perfect script thrown at us.
It was almost finding a musicality--taking dialogue and say 'let's

³ Quay Brothers interview, 1996.

⁴ Quay Brothers, 1986, p.1.

⁵ Quay Brothers interview, 1996.

musicalise it' without making it in its standard conception a musical. The voice-over could be pushed towards the music itself. It is just one of the elements you can play with.⁶

The linking of dialogue--which was actually more a set of monologues than interpersonal discussion between the actors--with the musicality of the film is also a nod to Robert Walser's writing style. The Quays described the process of Institute Benjamenta's script development with a musical term 'to score', a gesture to the musicality of Walser's text.⁷ The musical analogy extends into the film's literary source, and considering their express interest in music, it is not coincidental that Walser's writing is often attributed with being full of musical analogies and metaphors. Peter Hamm suggests although his work may be richer in under-, over- and middle tones, Walser's deepest love was for the 'Eintönige' (literally 'one-tonality, monotone', a composite and musical word play on mediocrity, daily life, and empty routine).⁸ The actors' voices are often monotone, sometimes pointedly musical and it is Polish composer Leszek Jankowski's score that suggests darker undercurrents and emotional conflicts. Yet there are other, earlier protagonists in the Quay Brothers' oeuvre, animated, voiceless ones that gain presence and credible existence in their own empty routines also via complex and often astonishingly subtle soundtracks. Jankowski's compositions flow through many of the Quay Brothers' films, including original scores for Rehearsals for Extinct Anatomies, Ex Voto, The Comb, Anamorphosis, Institute Benjamenta and music composition for three commercials. Their working relationship goes back to 1981 when they heard his music at a performance of the Poznan-based Polish theatre group 'Theater of the Eighth Day' (Teatr Ósmego Dnia). They had also encountered his compositions at an outdoor screening in Berlin, and contacted him for possible co-operation in a future project that became Street of Crocodiles, that again will be the main focus of this chapter, as its treatment of sound is indicative for many of the other sound-driven works.

The Conspiratorial Climate of Music

The Quays were introduced to Jankowski in a vacant children's playground in Stockwell, London, and at the time were working on a project around Aleksandr

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Hamm, 1996. Author translation.

Luria's The Man With a Shattered World. Communicating through translators, they exchanged letters over the next four years--Jankowski's in Polish, the Quays' in English.⁹ They began to listen to cassettes of Jankowski's music for theatre and discovered he was also an admirer of Schultz. When the Street of Crocodiles project was approved by the British Film Institute in 1984, the Quays contacted him to propose music, effectively giving him a carte blanche: "We never said; write a sequence for this, we said; write six thirty-second pieces; it was as vague as that."¹⁰ A cassette with three fragments impressed them so much they asked him for more, this time with suggestions and instructions, and a dozen more fragments completed the film's music. While most of the animation sequences had been made before the music arrived, the Quays 'improvised' to the music and re-animated some of the scenes: "we'd tighten or shorten or lengthen the scenes so that they would fit".¹¹ They listened to the music continuously during shooting--it also accompanied them during re-shooting some of the scenes. Having music before the film was completed digressed from the more common production process of adding music after the film is shot. Their own description of the film's development suggests analogies to using central motifs for composing a musical score:

The film grew from its interior outwards with music more often than not being at the very core of the sequence, in particular, the film's finale: the elegant broken 'Automaton's Waltz' which had Leszek [Jankowski] reading the closing lines of the Bruno Schulz story.¹²

This loose, less systematic method of action and reaction bears analogy with the pictorial (and language) collage process of *cadavres exquis* (exquisite corpse) that the Surrealists engaged in collaboratively that is based on chance (recall the Quays' concept of 'the liberation of the mistake'). The Quays' associative, organic process of responding to Janowski's constituent music fragments--that he himself did not know what they would be used for--did not provide a causal or temporal order for the 'ordering' or choreography of these images or shots. This is apparent in the important role they ascribe to music in their production process:

In a strange way, when we get Leszek's music, we play it again and again, and you take it deep inside your system. And I am convinced that when

⁹ Quay Brothers, 1986, p. 2.

¹⁰ Quay Brothers interview, 1992.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Quay Brothers, 1986, p. 3.

you start to animate, you're animating with that music in your film, because you've taken it in so deep. And sometimes you fail, and you just can't. When [the film] comes back, and it is connected with the music, suddenly there's a revelation and then you know it has worked.¹³

Jankowski's compositions provide none of the stereotype motifs that are often found in emotion-evoking narrative films--rather, the passages, sounds and noises create a unique idiosyncratic audio-temporal space in their own right, one that owes little to traditional music composition for films, and even less to narrative and emotional conventions that explicate and underpin imagery.

The idea of animating with the music as they animate is remarkable: a few seconds of film can take hours to shoot, and to choreograph the movements to sound at this level of minute precision requires an ability to work with the relative distention of two seconds to possibly 2 hours. I'd like to address Michel Chion's assertion that sound temporalises images, and especially so if we bear in mind the disjunctive temporality of the single-frame technique. Chion describes three ways the image is temporalised: "The first is temporal animation of the image . . . second, sound endows shots with temporal linearization [and third] sound vectorizes or dramatizes shots, orienting them towards a future, a goal, a creation of a feeling of imminence and expectation."¹⁴ Street of Crocodiles' animated spatial realms are created by a succession of shots that present these spaces and the objects and their actions and locations are often disparate, disjointed, solitary, nondiscursive (in a narrativising sense). They often provide neither a sense of temporal succession nor of simultaneity, in some cases because there is no spatial coherence with the shot before or that follows. Chion suggests that "the addition of realistic, diegetic sound imposes on the sequence a sense of real time...that is linear and sequential."¹⁵ Because the sounds that normally accompany the Quays' images are musical, nondiscursive and abstract (noise will be treated in more detail below), the sense of time they impose is often not sequential, and while it does pull the images together, in that they 'share' the sounds that accompany them, it is vectorised with a sense of dramatisation towards a future or reflecting back upon a past. But this vectorisation, that should guide the viewer (and listener) can also be located in an apprehensive lack of knowledge about where the dramatisation leads, because there is no a priori knowledge of the realm's laws or the puppets' and objects' behaviour. The music, however, does give the realm credence by creating a sense of the passage of time,

¹³ Quay Brothers interview, 1994.

¹⁴ Chion, 1994, p. 13.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 17-18.

albeit a musical time that does not correspond to our everyday sense of reality, but that offers emotional pleasure. Particular auditive tropes and repeating motifs that are associated with specific spaces and objects also give the film periodicity.

Music, Sound, Noise

In his foreword to the 1981 edition of Theory of Film Practice, originally published in 1969, Noel Burch excuses himself for writing a book based on an embarrassment--that he invoked formalism in his study, what he calls:

a formalism of the worst kind, which might also be called 'musicalism', or, perhaps most precisely, flight from meaning . . . The films of Eisenstein, Resnais, Antonioni, Bergman and others--a certain, rather ingenious, eclecticism was, perhaps, a virtue here--'stood out above the pack' not because of the stories they told--everybody told stories, and theirs were not fundamentally different--but because of Something Else, because of their way in which they organised the formal parameters of their discourse.¹⁶

Describing the interplay of image, sounds and music in the Quay Brothers' films that are mostly loose, musical and experimental narratives is an exegetic 'flight from meaning', and explaining it can be a highly subjective exercise. Burch goes on to describe his initial methodological ideal as musical and this ideal has affinities to my own.¹⁷ Since the Quays' engagement with sound and music is so extensive and distinct, defining some formal acoustic parameters helps us begin to articulate the interworkings of these with the image track that result in the apprehensive qualities of their work, perhaps explaining the appeal these works have for audiences, the 'Something Else' Burch describes. Because of the innate complexity of music image relationships, I choose not to undertake an unsatisfying and more general description of some of the sound track features with a more formal analysis of sound tracks. This would in fact require access to the score, comprehension of dubbing sheets and musicological expertise. This is not my intention here; much more I am attempting to isolate some of the sound and music track's key elements and motifs that relate to montage systems and support the image track (and vice versa). I therefore believe it is more useful to the reader to undertake a more detailed analysis of sound and

¹⁶ Burch 1981, pp. vi.-vii

¹⁷ Like Burch, I also "read Finnegan's Wake aloud for the sound". Burch 1981, p. viii.

image in a selection of scenes and sequences in Street of Crocodiles, drawing on scenes and sequences that have already been discussed in previous chapters. This synecdochal exploration is both conceptual and practical and I hope it will provide a 'way in' for listeners and viewers to the dialectics of the relatively unexplored musical and extramusical, immaterial and material, auditive phenomena in this and other Quay films.

Music, sound--and to a far lesser extent, noise--in cinema are increasingly subjects of academic scrutiny, and except for a handful of texts that mainly address music in cartoons, there is as yet rather modest engagement with the sound track in animation-specific studies. Points of reference for my analytical, aesthetic and formal explorations that follow are therefore Eisenstein, Chion's valuable work towards aesthetics and a theory of sound in film, based in part on groundbreaking work by Pierre Schaeffer, and Doug Kahn's Noise Water Meat (1999), a remarkable interdisciplinary history of sound and noise in the arts. Also helpful along the way are Karel Reisz's notions of montage and sound and Burch's investigations into off-screen sound. Because sounds and noises are as significant in this chapter as music, for the former I orient myself to Luigi Russolo's definition of sound as the result of a succession of regular and periodic vibrations¹⁸ and to Kahn's encompassing, speculative and listener-oriented taxonomy of sound, that that includes

all [sounds] that might fall within or touch on auditive phenomena, whether this involves actual sonic or auditive events or ideas about sound or listening; sounds actually heard or heard in myth, idea or implication; sounds heard by everyone or imagined by one person alone; or sounds as they fuse with the sensorium as a whole.¹⁹

While I am interested in describing elements of Chion's rather broad added value with which:

a sound enriches a given image so as to create the definite impression, in the immediate or remembered experience one has of it, that this information or expression "naturally" comes from what is seen, and is already contained in the image itself.²⁰

¹⁸ Russolo, 1986, p. 37.

¹⁹ Kahn, 2001, p. 3.

²⁰ Chion, 1994, p. 5.

these are less pertinent in the Quays' film for two reasons. Much (but not all) of what their imagery represents does not have an ascribed 'natural sound' in the composition and because these are animated images of inanimate materials, the information or expression cannot naturally come from what we see (as I will argue later). However, Chion's concept of "anempathetic sound" is far more promising for analysis of the Quays' voiceless, music-driven films. Chion describes this sound--music--as indifferent when it progresses in "a steady, undaunted and ineluctable manner: the scene takes place against this very backdrop of 'indifference'. This juxtaposition of scene with indifferent music has the effect not of freezing emotion but rather of intensifying it, by inscribing it on a cosmic background."²¹ This is a quality, as I will explain below, that forces us to engage with the film's visual fragments and scenes, including solitary hiatuses or hermetic shots that incite apprehension. Chion suggests that "we have reason to consider [anempathetic music] to be intimately related to cinema's essence--its mechanical nature."²² While this latter proposal has wide-ranging consequences for any sound-based study of animation film, I will explore it only via the mechanistic nature sounds of the metaphysical machines that populate the cosmogony of Street of Crocodiles.

Sounds can be invaded by noises, and noises are sometimes invasive, mainly elusive auditory phenomena that often defy description. Chion states that noises are one of many units of a film's soundtrack and that "the composite and culture-bound notion of noise is closely related to the question of materialising indices".²³ This is a notion that I will discuss in more detail in relation to the cinematic representation of extant objects and spaces in puppet animation (as distinct from graphic 2D animation). Kahn's more useful, because more detailed and imaginative, description of noise calls upon eminent and Modernist avantgarde musicologists, composers and sound theorists, including Hermann Helmholtz and Russolo. The latter asserts that noise is "'caused by motions that are irregular, as much as in time as in intensity".²⁴ Kahn also describes noise as nonperiodic vibrations²⁵ that can also include percussive sounds made by percussion instruments. Jankowski's use of percussion is not limited to drums, cymbals or piano--single plucking of string instruments or mouth-resonating instruments adds to his percussive noise repertoire. As well, Kahn's more precise definitions of noise actually overlap and further qualify Chion's

²¹ Ibid., p. 8.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., p. 115.

²⁴ Russolo, 1986, p. 37.

²⁵ Kahn, 2001, p. 82.

term 'anempathetic music' because while Chion is describing music, the kinds of music and sound that he singles out as having anempathetic qualities, to which he also attributes mechanical qualities, have something in common with noise created from non-musical sources.

A further useful set of properties that helps us unravel the soundtrack's poetics are three acoustic properties that Bordwell suggests helps the spectator to distinguish sounds.²⁶ The first is loudness, that "establishes the spatial qualities of the realm: distance, shifting proximities, acoustic 'foregrounds and backgrounds, off-screen space". While changes in loudness are in part responsible for spatial qualities, because the sounds are not ones that have added value that seem to naturally originate in what is seen, loudness is not a prominent formal property of the Street of Crocodiles soundtrack's qualities. The second property is pitch, "which can be categorised as 'pure' tones (music) vs. 'complex' tones, a mix of differing frequencies helps to identify properties of materials, densities." Changes in pitch are caused by differences in the periodic vibrations of tone. This is especially important in both Jankowski's score and in the added sounds, because both use materials that are not normally associated as originating from a musical wind or percussion instrument.

The third property Bordwell mentions and potentially the most important for understanding the film's soundtrack's complexity is timbre: "harmonic components of sound that give colour or tone quality. The recognition of sound is usually based on timbre." Kahn points out how Russolo extends this rather conventional (and music-based) conception of timbre in a remarkable way:

Russolo pointed out that what were commonly understood as musical sounds were themselves characterised by the acoustical irregularities that produce an instrument's timbral signature and were thus in effect instances of noise in the midst of music. . . . Russolo's argument was not just formulated in formal, acoustic terms but replaced notions of purity with a richness of noise meant to correspond to the richness of life.²⁷

This notion and that of auditive materiality is central to the origination of the noises and sounds that predominate in certain montage sequences of Street of Crocodiles, also because according to Kahn, "Russolo's noise presented timbre as a resident noise

²⁶ Bordwell and Thompson, 2008, p 267ff.

²⁷ Kahn, 2001, p. 80.

that invoked the world without incorporating it."²⁸ Resident noise is a complex notion of "noisy correspondences within music [that are] emphasised as themselves bearing traces of the world of true extramusicality".²⁹ I will articulate specific extramusical resident noises in the Quay Brothers' films in a later section, noises that create a world on screen, distinct from the phenomenal world we experience. The extramusical origins and timbre of the many of these noises in both the music and other audio tracks, while originating from sources in the world we live in, add innate complexity to the exegetic process of sound, music and image in the realm of Street of Crocodiles.

Musical Dialectics

As I've already mentioned, the Quay's experimental narrative strategies are obliged in part to affinities they bear with Early Cinema: gesture instead of dialogue, juxtaposition and symbolic imagery rather than narrative continuity. Karel Reisz suggests that the introduction of sound to Early Cinema "largely caused film-makers to concentrate on realistic narrative and to discard the silent cinema's methods of indirect visual allusion."³⁰ According to Reisz, the irritating effect of symbolic juxtaposition combined with realistic narrative continuity irritates the spectator, who is required to adjust his or her reception from a smoothly-flowing story to intellectual, contrived imagery, thus causing a break in continuity. The meandering, elliptical narratives in the majority of the Quay Brothers' short films, including Street of Crocodiles, rarely aim for continuity and make greater use of Early Cinema's systems of indirect visual allusion, employing sound as a symbolic counterpart rather than as a descriptive narrative function. While many of the Quays' music and sound effects both enhance and confuse spatial and object organisation, creating a musical rhetoric that obeys its own laws, this rhetoric is also responsible for the objects' emotional and material qualities and it locates them as well in the films' unusual 'worlds'. The viewer can acquire knowledge and experience to recognise these defamiliarised relations between music and sound and objects within the diegesis, creating his or her own version of a narrative. This is also central device in most of their films. We are confronted with odd, strangely beautiful figures and forms in non-continuous, but somehow connected spaces: the music and sounds organise these and also add emotional qualities to the objects in them and assuage

²⁸ Ibid., p. 81.

²⁹ Kahn, in Clarke, 2002, p. 179.

³⁰ Reisz, 1991, p. 64.

apprehension. Through repetition of sound and music cues, we acquire a posteriori knowledge that also allows us to develop our expectations.

The introduction of sound to cinema provoked many reactions, and Kahn suggests that when "the principles of montage were applied within the context of asynchronous sound film, sound--once it was no longer tied directly to visual images, speech, and story--was able to exist in a more complex relation with them".³¹ As I intend to continue developing dialectical montage concepts, I return to Eisenstein. In the 1928 collective "Statement" on the potential uses and abuses of sound in cinema, Eisenstein et al asserted that

ONLY A CONTRAPUNTAL USE OF SOUND in relation to the visual montage will afford a new potentiality of montage development and perfection. THE FIRST EXPERIMENTAL WORK WITH SOUND MUST BE DIRECTED ALONG THE LINE OF ITS DISTINCT NON-SYNCHRONISATION WITH THE VISUAL IMAGES. And only then will such an attack give the necessary palpability which will later lead to the creation of an ORCHESTRAL COUNTERPOINT of visual and aural images."³²

Both Kahn, and to a lesser degree, Chion, discuss the Statement's critique and its contribution to later development of sound in cinema, Chion noting that Eisenstein's example of audiovisual counterpoint remains dominant in current cinema.³³ Kahn engages more deeply with Eisenstein's montage concepts and synthesises these with Eisenstein's observations on the early Disney cartoon.³⁴ In 1986, the year Street of Crocodiles was completed, the Quays wrote their own statement "In Deciphering the Pharmacist's Prescription 'On Lip-Reading Puppets'".³⁵ The text can be read as a poetic manifesto on creating a particular mood and function of music and sound that has persisted in their works over the years. It describes some of the aesthetic aims for music and soundtrack development that has affinities with Eisenstein's ideas about experimental work with sound, and both manifestos will be referred to here. I will develop concepts of contrapuntal image and sound montage of the Statement and forays into other montage writings of Eisenstein about the combinatory powers of

³¹ Kahn, 2001, p. 11.

³² Eisenstein, Pudovkin and Alexandrov, in: Eisenstein, 1977, pp 257-60.

³³ Chion, 1994, p. 91.

³⁴ Kahn, 2001, pp 148-151.

³⁵ Quay Brothers, 1986.

image and sound--as distinct from voice and dialogue--into an aesthetic dialectic for the sound phenomena in the Quay Brothers' films.

As filmmakers, the Quays' 'methodology' is an expressly musical one: "Every element is considered and composed whether it's a puppet or an object. They are conceived physically but also musically, and hence inseparable."³⁶ Street of Crocodile's montage sequences develop a complex dialectic that both enhances the spatial disorientation and provides aural guidance to the film's world. The movements do not follow the music as much as interact with it: sometimes this combination satisfies Eisenstein's contrapuntal orchestration, other times it is polyphonic and harmonious. Another way of understanding this choreography of rhythms is as a dialectic of montage that extends to the sound track, that the fluidity of space they seek is achieved by a precise, intentional counterpoint between music and image, a musical dialectic that creates the otherness of the laws of their films' worlds.

One of the Quays' aesthetic aims in their 1986 manifesto is a "climate allowing reciprocal contamination of image and music resulted in 'the music to be 'seen' and the images 'heard'".³⁷ While this resonates the visual music as described by absolute filmmakers who worked with animated film form, the Quays' unique use of music is distinct from visual music, that uses abstract, graphic forms. Their films use puppets, objects, sets and spaces, and the music is often the main emotional, and some times spatial, cue that helps the viewer negotiate these spaces. There are sounds and noises that interrupt the music's guidance, but these interruptions contribute to a coherence as well. Kahn suggests that "it is through interruption that the semblance of a continuous unity is brought to bear on the actual profusion and disparity of phenomena . . . it is only through noise that the famed ephemerality of music is secured as ephemeral."³⁸ It is also highly relevant that throughout their work, the music, and most of the sounds, are for the most part acousmatic, "sounds one hears without seeing their originating cause"³⁹ as distinct from visualised sound, what Chion describes as sound "accompanied by the sight of its source or cause".⁴⁰ I will argue that this reciprocal contamination dovetails with Eisenstein's concepts of montage. To explain their aural montage, I distinguish three main dialectical

³⁶ Quays Questionnaire 1, in Rust Gray, 6.

³⁷ Quay Brothers, 1986, p.3.

³⁸ Kahn, 2001, p. 43.

³⁹ Schaeffer, 1967, pp. 91-99.

⁴⁰ Chion, 1994, p. 72.

functions of music, sound and noise in *Street of Crocodiles* that share properties with some dialectical pairs described in Chapter 8 (included here in brackets):⁴¹

1. Narrative development and anempathetic apprehension (narrative and non-narrative strategies, continuity and discontinuity) Narrative development occurs when music and sounds provide what Chion calls 'added value' and when sounds support actions or incite emotional or empathetic engagement. Anempathetic apprehension causes narrative hiatus and occurs when the image is matched with inappropriate sounds, breaks in sound (silence) in moments of self-reflexivity, when association of one sound with various images.

2. Embodied and disembodied sound

Examples of this are diegetic sound, concrete and metaphoric use of sound, sound distortion and superimposition and sound edited to create the effect of an inappropriate physical connection to the image.

3. Spatial coherence and disjunction (orientation and disorientation; spatial connectedness and disconnectedness). This includes manipulation of sound temporalities (reversal, slowing down or speeding up, discrepancy between sound quality and visible space and discrepancy between sound and visual location).

In the musical montage of *Street of Crocodiles*, compositions, sound and image are defamiliarised, as the images are so closely bound to the soundtrack that it does not have a subordinate function--the sound, music and noises are the non-anthropocentric, auditive 'voices' of the spaces, the puppets and the metaphysical machines that coalesce into a dialectical sound strategy for the film's 'world'.

To explore the first dialectic--narrative development and anempathetic apprehension--I describe experiential auditive phenomena in a series of shots at the beginning of the film as it moves between live action and animation, and moves between more realistic, temporality-inducing sounds and the more abstract, less sequential ones of music. While their music-driven montage dominates the film, it can be contiguous with their mixing of conventional and experimental editing systems described in the previous chapter. In some scenes the music follows conventional usage and provides emphasis, aural support of movement and rhythm, melody, harmony and instrumentation. An example of this is in the black and white

⁴¹ These are in part based on Lucy Fischer's categories for describing Dziga Vertov's *Enthusiasm: Symphony of the Donbas* in Fischer, 1985, pp 247-264.

live-action opening scene in the theatrical stage setting. For the role they cast Feliks Stawinsky, the caretaker at the Polish Club in South Kensington, London, who assisted in the Club's small theatre. The Quays directed him to do precisely the simple, almost banal movements his job required--like counting the lights needed for a performance. The film commences with a close-up of a hand flipping a magnifying glass above a map, concurrent with the first sound of a clock ticking--slower than a beat a second. The ticking is joined by slow, almost lazy whistling (Jankowski) from 0:16 that supports the actor's actions as he enters the theatre space and counts the lights. These sounds from the phenomenal, 'real' world--a clock ticking, a human body's breath whistling--are in accord with the spaces he negotiates. The rhythmic, meandering whistling and repetitive clock ticking create an anempathetic tension, but because they are relatively constant and become predictable, they contribute to a linearity of time. These sounds are then joined by an intermittent harp strum and as time passes, its intervals are less spaced apart, and whilst cyclical, the time period between strums decreases, adding tension and expectation to the viewer who becomes aware of the slight variation in time gaps, increasing apprehension of the realm. As the actor climbs onto the stage, a blue film title is superimposed on the image. The actor exits frame right (0:43) and the whistling fades out as string music commences to join the harp (0:47 - 0:50). The music and ticking continue and at 0:44 the camera cuts to a series of black and white macro close-ups of metal objects--a wire mesh, scissors, a pulley, an enamelled bowl of screws--and on a hard cut at 0:57 to a wooden object with a superimposed title 'Prelude: The Wooden Esophagus'. While the harp is a sound bridge heard in both the live-action and animated realms, the strings signal a change, and the apprehension they create is both heightened and appeased with the striking visual appearance of these objects.

The actor then enters the frame in medium close-up and looks through the eyepiece of the 'Wooden Esophagus'. The clock fades out at 1:02 as the image fades out in the live action realm. After the man looks down into the eyepiece the music continues and intensifies during a series of cross cuts during a montage sequence between the live-action realm: the Wooden Esophagus interior's machines and pulleys, now in colour, and the puppet whose hand is tied to the inside of a lamp fixture. The Quays explain the subtle changes in the music during this sequence and how they are meant to affect the viewer:

As the music became edgier and darker, we wanted it to seem as though one of the exhibition pieces was secretly luring [the actor]. He intuitively

knew that the price of admission for the object to work was not a coin, but a private earthy offering of saliva. We had him think of the Madonna as he worked up his saliva. It was his anointment which set everything into action.⁴²

This 'anointment', a gob of real spit from the man's mouth, drops into the Esophagus and is subtly replaced by an animated one when the camera cuts to the colour world. The strum of a harp is heard as camera movement down into the Esophagus begins, the flowing sound an aural equivalent to the flowing camera movement. It signals a change in music as the animated spit sets the animated realm in motion and the dramatic music is joined by the sound of squeaks, wheels and rattles and pulleys as the static machines begin churning and gyrating. Each of these sounds belongs to an object: the squeak to a sewing machine, the turning wheel to the pulleys, and the rattle we hear is later revealed as caused by the puppet's hand shaking in a glass lantern. The transition to the animated realm is complete when, at 2:14, the puppet is freed by the man's snip of a scissors located at waist height on the Esophagus' exterior that he inserts to cut the wires running along the pulleys. This sequence suggests the puppet is somehow 'tied' to the live-action realm, and the snip effectively severs the connection between live action and animation. The puppet, freed, then passes through an opening into the main room of the Wooden Esophagus Antechamber, touches the knotted cord that unravels and raises a semi-transparent screen that he passes under, leaving the Antechamber to enter the Street of Crocodiles 'Zone'.

What is unusual here is that the live-action sequence had no diegetic sounds to support the actor's movements--no scuffles, breathing or footsteps--and in the animated realm seemingly diegetic sounds are introduced. Via a series of cross-cut short scenes interspersed with two fast pans and varying focal lengths in BCU, the montage sequence, together with music and sounds that guide our spatial orientation, 'narrates' the shift between the man in the live-action realm and the animated realm. In his reading of "The Statement" Kahn suggests that for Russian dialectics of silent film montage "[s]ound threatened to smooth over the conflict by dictating a scene naturalistically at the slower pace set by the synchronisation of speech emanating from bodies and sound from objects and actions."⁴³ Because the music and sounds in the live-action and animated realm are non-naturalistic, the first

⁴² Quay Brothers, in Rust Gray, *Quay Questions* 2, 3.

⁴³ Kahn, 2001, p. 146.

dialectic--narrative development and an empathetic apprehension--can be maintained, in effect smoothly bridging the aural transition from one to the other. Bridging the cut was also a use of sound that Eisenstein suggested that Kahn sees as the way conventional cinema would later adopt for music.⁴⁴

The sound track for the complex montage sequences in the rest of the film follow less conventional musical laws than the live-action sequence. Together with the image composition and montage, this sound completes the aural and spatial complexity of Street of Crocodiles. In the film's 'tiny theatres' the non-human actants acquire emotional qualities through a use of music that is far removed from one that aims for illustrative or narrative functions. Eisenstein describes the theatrical elements of Kabuki theatre as a system cinema should aim to emulate, a single monistic sensation", a "single unit of theatre" that, "[i]n the place of accompaniment, it is the naked element of transfer that flashes in the Kabuki theatre. Transferring the basic affective aim from one material to another, from one category of 'provocation' to another."⁴⁵ The viewer of Street of Crocodiles is provoked on two levels--by the experience of strangely beautiful animated objects that do not move in the phenomenal world melded with musical compositions that are the aural counterpart of these images. An example of this provocation, this transfer of affects from one material to another, takes place and is heard in these theatres in a single shot, the 'Screw Dance', that commences directly after the one described above.

Silence is invaded by a soft, rhythmic, distant hissing as sombre blackness fades up to an abstract composition of rough vertical and horizontal rectangular forms that frame thick and mottled glass panes in front of corroded metal forms. The rhythmic hissing becomes the sound of a tram approaching that passes and fades into the distance of an off-screen space as an xylophone's simple child-like melody begins. The camera pans up, to the left, back to the right and down a glass pane that is partly covered by a wooden plaque with Polish writing on it, and comes to rest at the bottom of the pane that is above striations of thick dust, while we hear the faint sound of crackling, dry twigs. Almost imperceptible, then slowly, a screw emerges from the dust, rotating as it dislodges itself, and we realise the crackling sound is the screw straining against its wooden moorings. A violin begins to play a six-note motif in a cycle, slower than the screw's urgent rotations, yet 'round' like the screw's movements. Behind the mottled glass, a rotating form slowly rises like a behemoth from its fixings, another thick, oily screw, much larger than the first screw, more

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 147.

⁴⁵ Eisenstein, 1949, p. 21.

sluggishly emerging from its invisible position below the visible surface. The fugue-like violin provides an emotional counterpart to this unfamiliar and compelling vision; it implores the screw to strain higher, higher, as the spiralled ridges reveal its cylindrical form. The first small screw disengages itself, falls and rolls off screen right, and a tambourine begins to rattle as a second smaller screw emerges with a similar, urgent spiral upwards that is faster than the rotating column in the background. This *pas de trois*, a visual fugue, is matched aurally by the three sounds. As the camera pans and cuts to other screws unscrewing themselves from wood, a second string instrument joins the first, higher in pitch and rich in harmonics, more urgent in rhythm than the first violin, suggesting the screws are in a hurry to free themselves from their wooden fixings. The last screws we see are in a different space, on a wooden window frame with out-of focus reflecting glass bulb forms behind another pane of glass. Hesitating at the last moment before disengaging themselves, the screws fall on their sides and, one trailing a curled wisp of old twine, another gathering sticky dust, they are joined by others in an exodus off-screen right.

The monistic ensemble Eisenstein describes (that recalls Artaud's notions of hieroglyphic theatre) is where "sound, movement, space and voice do not accompany (or even parallel) one another but are treated as equivalent elements."⁴⁶ Sound, music and objects in the sequence described above--screws of various sizes, in this instance--have a lateral hierarchy and achieve the monistic status described by Eisenstein. Kahn further interprets this:

Once elements have reached their monistic status through the decomposition of larger complexes, the very process of decomposition has lent them a nonnaturalistic autonomy from which they can combine with other elements outside the conventions of synchronisation.⁴⁷

During this shot, that lasts less than a minute, the individual objects within the composition--window panes and screws--seem to achieve a 'state' that far exceeds their inorganic one. The shot contains transitions (fades and fast track shifts) but the camera remains in the same diegetic space, travelling on horizontal and vertical axes, tapping out the diegetic space for us and at the same time establishing the relative autonomy of the as yet to appear screws as it comes to rest. As the large screw begins its rotation and emergence, the violin begins. While there seems to be a kind of synchronisation, the sound is not imitative; rather, while it also has a repetitive,

⁴⁶ Eisenstein, 1988, p. 119.

⁴⁷ Kahn, 2001, p. 155.

spiralling motif it is asynchronous, not enchained to the rhythm of the screw's rotation, and this evokes anempathetic apprehension. Kahn's example of how such nonnaturalistic autonomy functions takes the human body as its object: "For instance, although the action of the pivoting elbow will not normally make noise, if it is isolated with a similarly isolated sound, it will produce a nonnaturalistic effect of the sound animating the action or the action giving rise to the sound."⁴⁸ The violin motif is not synchronised to start with the screw's movement--that is underlaid by what sounds like cracking twigs or wood, that then disappears--so the sound of the violin and the image of the screw moving have individual performative effects, that, because of a slight lag in the music's timing and repetition, allow them to retain their status of isolation, yet co-existing in the film experience.

In the 'Watch Death' sequence an open pocket watch is surrounded in a symmetrical organisation of its inner parts. We hear a single high-pitched, almost continuous violin, distinct in timbre and colour from soft, overtone guitar pluckings that are joined by the ticking of a clock that sounds like the watch. A hard cut shows a frontal view of the watch in a glass case that then cuts to a close-up of a fragment of it in the lower right hand corner of the glass. More screws and a nail emerge from the wood casing, climb onto the watch and penetrate its enamel face, cracking it as they move through the watch body. The watch face cover flips up, the watch rotates and the back metal casing flips open to reveal the nail and screws emerging with a squishy sound from its back, a circular mass of red, soft, moist flesh, to the sound of a full guitar strum and a more resonant, lower pitched violin, before they wander off to the table edge and disappear, the images fades to black and the music ends. The sounds throughout this sequence--enamel cracking, the clock ticking throughout the sequence, metal rolling on wood, are 'embodied sounds', the 'voices' of the screws and metaphysical machines, This is an example of what Chion calls indifferent, or anempathetic music, but with sounds added. The indifferent sounds also have a timbre (Russolo) and it is a factor that endow each of the puppets and 'metaphysical' machines with its own voice, a musical motif, a combination of sounds and music that mirror their collaged construction and strange movements without explanation, and this allows the viewer a much greater exegetic and emotional freedom. This combination of embodied and disembodied sound (the second dialectic), helps us comprehend the complex interworking and lateral hierarchy of the sound and image track.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

In addition to its anempathetic effect, there is something else at work in this and other sequences that is another example of the dialectic of embodied and disembodied sound. Costantini highlights an unusual use of sound combining a macro shallow focus image with what he insightfully calls "a 'shallow' sound that lacks perspective or projection in the space (as if the space were defined not by the illusion of depth, like most spaces in cinema, but by the visual/ photographic result)".⁴⁹ This is found throughout the Quay Brothers' works, and a good example of it is the monochrome to colour sequence that moves between the live action and animated realms in Street of Crocodiles. In the Wooden Esophagus at 0:44-0:56, in an L-shaped camera trajectory interconnecting a total of four sets of objects sharing a diegetic space (metal and wire mesh objects, screws in a white bowl, scissors and pulleys) are filmed in monochrome in varying degrees of chiaroscuro and shallow focus. It is significant to note that none of this is animated, although the unusual fast pan shifts and macro close-ups instil a sense of spatial apprehension. In the sequence, two calibrated pans takes us down a vertical irregular wooden surface (that remains in shallow focus so it is hard to see what it actually is) from two wire mesh objects first to a set of pulleys on a wooden construction. At this point a very faint, almost indiscernible sound of violins commences and the strumming and the whistling fade and stop. The camera rests a moment, and after the next downwards pan it rests again on a dark compartment of sorts with screws and metal-rimmed glass discs. During this the single violin is joined by other strings, though their voices are difficult to single out. The camera then makes a fast shift pan to the right to a white bowl full of screws. This sequence is followed by superimposed blue titles 'Prelude. The 'Wooden Esophagus', and the violin music, along with the ticking clock that continues uninterrupted into the cut to live action.

The music and sounds throughout this sequence do indeed have a 'shallow' quality for two reasons. The first is that the aural motifs do not seem to 'belong' to any of the objects or the actor: while it is tempting to allocate the whistling to the him, he is not whistling himself and the sound continues into the macro realm of objects. The second is that it isn't really clear what music and sound are supporting or enhancing on the visual track, and when more than one sound or music is present, they are more contrapuntal than harmonic. This aural disjointedness caused by variations in loudness, pitch and timbre, echoes the camera's wandering character is an aesthetic of the third dialectic (spatial coherence and disjunction). It contributes a mood of uncertainty and apprehension to the hermetic images in the (pre-)animated

⁴⁹ Costantini, 2007.

realm. Whilst I would not agree with Constatini's observation that the focus blur is a condition of the objects and not a result of working with lenses, he provocatively, and rightly, proposes that in such scenes, the sound has a "very shallow 'depth of field'."⁵⁰ The experience of these sounds are closer to Laura Marks' description of haptic hearing, "that usually brief moment when all sounds present themselves to us undifferentiated . . . that can be sustained for longer, before specific sounds focus our attention."⁵¹ This undifferentiated sound is intimately related to the anempathetic, indifferent music described by Chion.

There are musical sequences that evoke association of a melody or musical phrase with one of the puppet or objects, or to give a mood to a set, in combination with effects of lighting and camera movement. An element of the first dialectic (narrative development and anempathetic apprehension), as we watch (and listen to) the film, we can identify developmental temporal patterns between image and sound that provide us with a posteriori knowledge. The music can also create and develop motifs that support and enhance the film's combination of functions and devices to strengthen a sense of a comprehensive formal system, as the Quays explain for Street of Crocodiles:

The final music which we always referred to (between each other, of course) as the 'Broken Automaton Waltz', suggested to us that the 'Zone' of the Street of Crocodiles –that it too had to break down, falter like the music, unhinge--and hence, the screws which, by their nature, hold things together, should unscrew, desert, and flee their moorings, including the moorings of the puppets themselves.⁵²

Different fragments of this musical passage occur in the film, helping the to cue viewer expectations and providing a partial, faint structure for the film's other visual and aural patterns and systems. The music can also function as a repeating motif from a previous image or scene: in 4:40-5:02, the small screws are accompanied by a shrill, squeaking strings, then at 5:11-5:38, we hear a similar music before the screws appear in the frame and screw themselves into the watch faces. And in the 'Hall of Mirrors' 'Bruno' finds himself in a glassed-in arcade, the music is a kind of waltz, playful, counterpointing the urgency of his attempts to escape. We hear a similar

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Marks, 2000, p. 183

⁵² Quay Brothers, in Rust Gray, Quay Questions p 2-3.

musical passage at 13:47-14:14, when the Tailor cues the three Assistants to the 'Automaton Waltz'.

In Street of Crocodiles the absence of dialogue (excepting the spoken Polish monologue at the end of the film) permits the Quays to give voices to Schulz's generatio aequivoca, because music and sound provide the orchestral counterpoint that catalyses the 'fantastic fermentation of matter', matter that is mute. Many of the metaphysical machines have their own sounds and noises. While the Quays stated in the last chapter that they construct their film around the voiceless puppets' point of view, interaction between the puppets is often cued by music, and often the music begins before eyeline matches, foreshadowing a shift. Rust Gray asked the Quays if they used what he called point of view sound in their films: "Enormously so in Crocodiles. Mini-landscapes of sound."⁵³ While the music and sound landscapes contribute to spatiotemporal understandings of the realm, they also guide us to interpret to the puppets' inner states and feelings. There are no facial expressions, few physical gestures that indicate emotion, so the music suggest these attributes and evokes an emotive response. Although music's main attribute is to cause emotional response, is not the music alone that develops the puppets' and objects' emotional worlds.

Mutters and Creaks

Street of Crocodiles' sound track includes sounds and noise samples that are not what would be considered 'musical' in a conventional sense--squeaks, the sound of metal rubbing on metal, moving hinges, scraping sounds, sounds that add material qualities to these objects and have a timbre, a quality of Russolo's description of resident noise. The noises are not simply minor 'figures' that support the music and interact with it. They are noises that become significant for a number of reasons, including their pertaining to "a complex of sources, motives, strategies, gestures, grammars [and] contexts".⁵⁴ Russolo proposed that "[t]he real and fundamental difference between sound and noise can be reduced to this alone: Noise is generally much richer in harmonics than sound."⁵⁵ Harmonics are generally heard as timbre of a sound, and timbre Jankowski's inclusion of irregular noises and periodic vibrations to the more stable acoustic experience of musical instruments infects the overall sound track seems exemplary for Kahn's description of Russolo's aesthetic project's

⁵³ Quays Questionnaire 1, *ibid.*, p. 11.

⁵⁴ Kahn, 2001, p. 20.

⁵⁵ Russolo, 1986, p. 37.

aims as one that opened up music to the plenitude of all sounds that included noise. The film's emotional quality and experimental narrative force is also strengthened by the affinity of Jankowski's unconventional, experimental musical compositions with Schulz's subject--animistic matter. The Quays: "Every object finds and has its own voice--which is a metaphoric voice--not a speaking voice in the conventional sense. It's more likely to be a musical voice--even silence. There's no hierarchy in this respect."⁵⁶ The examples of anempathetic music and shallow sound and their timbral 'voices' or colour described above are the aural motifs for the metaphysical machines.

In Jankowski's experimental score, pure tones and complex tones add periodicity to the music--he utilised the different pitch frequencies already, so the added sounds on different tracks were easily integrated into the musical score, giving coherence to both. Jankowski's compositions work with a term that emerged in the mid-1980s--musicalisation of sound--that Kahn attributes to Canadian audio artist Dan Lander, "a means to identify and supersede techniques in which sounds and noises were made significant by making them musical".⁵⁷ The complex sounds emphasise and collude with the 'pure' tones of Jankowski's eerie score that provides intermittent narrative threads and emotional qualities. The 'figures' of these sounds offer satisfying complexities, as does their interaction both with the images and the music. The enormous range of sounds and rhythms in their films make sustained use of what Marks calls the relationship between aural textures and aural signs that she says "can be as complex as the relationship between haptic and optical images".⁵⁸ Playing with our typically narrative expectations of the relationship between image, sound and music, the Quays aesthetic strategy is one of matching and mismatching textures and signs and giving musical and other sound 'voices' to their puppets, sets and objects. These remarkable soundscapes serve all three dialectics of sound that result in a remarkably haptic cinematic 'world'.

The Quays engaged Larry Sider to create the sound track for Street of Crocodiles; his attuned understanding of what the Quays were trying to attain is one of the reasons for the film's great success. The complexity of sound effects in the film does not suggest, exaggerate or enhance realism; it contributes rather to the associative potential of the visual images, oscillating between the abstraction and emotional qualities of music and the more unsettling, because indeterminate, relationships of captured noises with the images they accompany, noises carefully

⁵⁶ Quays Questionnaire 1, in Rust Gray, 8.

⁵⁷ Kahn, 2001, p. 18.

⁵⁸ Marks, 2000, p. 183.

created, chosen and edited. Sider is very specific about the intentions underlying his collection of sounds and noises, and how:

Very early on we found that the sound had to be as organic as the picture. We couldn't start having synthesised 'whooshes'--it just didn't make sense. So you had wood and paper and cloth and metal and what was around. You had to record often what they used to make their films.⁵⁹

The Quays use what I call embodied sounds that trigger a mental image of its material origination. A pulley can sound like a pulley, rolling wheels squeak, a plaster hand rattles in a glass lampshade. Closely related to the music in pitch, tone and timbre to the music, subtle differences to the sounds were made that were then assigned to each of the figures and spaces. The film had twenty separate sound tracks that were manually (analogue) mixed and then transferred to the film's sound track. Very little time was spent preparing sounds: Sider comments that he did not recall developing a treatment before the mix, and in spite of the complexity and number of tracks the sound track for Street of Crocodiles took around two days:

These are very complicated tracks when you get done. I mean the average short film will have a bit of synch dialogue, some music, and a few sound effects . . . [In Street of Crocodiles] you go along with one track of music and suddenly you hit a period that covers 10 seconds and it will need 16 tracks.⁶⁰

Some sounds are familiar as they pervade the Quays' soundtracks as aural evocations of spatial motifs. One of these is the sound of a streetcar that originally came from the BBC's sound library for tram effects. They used it for the first time when working on Nocturna Artificialia and it reappears in Street of Crocodiles. Other sounds were made using elements and objects from the sets themselves or sourced from their working environments:

You're in the studio and you suddenly see something that moves and makes a noise and it's not the sort of object you find every day. So, you

⁵⁹ Sider Interview, in Rust Gray, p. 10.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 8.

can know that this is a unique sound, or not unique, but it's different. So you use it.⁶¹

Sider's practical description of discovering noises that are 'different' becomes significant if thought about alongside Kahn's proposal that "[w]ith so much attendant on noise it quickly becomes evident that noises are too significant to be noises."⁶² I will explore these two descriptions of noise in a slight digression about diegetic sound.

As it is shot single frame, technically speaking, animation can never have a diegetic sound track.⁶³ To my knowledge, to date no author has addressed this issue in any depth. Films that aim for hyperrealism or an anthropomorphic or anthropological representation in animation film tend to use empathetic sound and the same sound effects as in live-action film: footsteps, wind in trees, the clinking of glasses, the sound of crying, sighs or laughter, chirping birds or urban ambient sound. The sounds are recorded in spaces--a hermetically sealed sound studio, a room with furniture and curtains that absorbs echoes or one with tile floors that echoes sounds, a natural outdoor environment--all of which affects the sound quality and its aural 'fit' with the images it underlays; these are tactile sounds, Russolo's 'resident noises'. Our ears can pick up the distinction between sound recorded in a small room with hard surfaces, that may include echoes and reverberations, and sound recorded in a vast hall or outdoors. In animation films, the spatial quality of descriptive or mimetic sound is often mismatched to the spatial dimensions of the animated films 'world', i.e. an intimate interior scene has a soundtrack that with ambient noises of a much larger space. The inherent discrepancy between the sound source ('real') and artificial, animated images can require a strong flight of fancy to align sounds from the 'real' world with images that are completely fabricated. Technically, the sound track for animation cannot record ambient sound of the scene being shot, and timing natural sound is extremely difficult to convincingly synchronise with animated movement.

My two observations--the technical impossibility of animation film having a diegetic sound track and the discrepancy sensed between a sound's original source and its aural/visual mismatch with an animated image--are compellingly questioned by the sound design in Street of Crocodiles. The Quays and Sider circumvent the

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 10.

⁶² Kahn, 1999, p. 21.

⁶³ Singular exceptions to this may be Oskar Fischinger's sound scrolls or Norman McLaren's scratching directly onto film's sound track to create optical sound.

aesthetic irritation of 'real' sound with a highly imaginative use of minimal, atonal, or arrhythmic sounds. By manipulating the sounds and their pitch and timbre they were able to add a musical quality to natural sounds and noises that complemented and counterpointed Jankowski's music. In a singular way, via the second dialectic (embodied and disembodied sound) the Quay Brothers' film challenges my two observations. Some of the sounds they use, that are aimed to match the texture of the objects and spaces, do have this quality, if not technically, then aurally and emotionally. By using what we could regard as nearly diegetic sounds--embodied sounds--for the metaphysical machines, adjusting pitch and timbre to alter the natural recorded sounds, the Quays and Sider increased the credence of the film's 'world' by creating a sound realm of Kahn's 'significant noises' that aurally matches the visible textures, densities and corporalities of the film's puppets, sets and objects. (This is also one of the few examples in the film of Chion's 'added value'.) This is especially clear in the 'Rubber Band Machine' sequence (6:45-6:52). The sound was planned to both counterpoint and underpin the images, as well as to foreground the technical and formal properties of shots. For instance, the Quays' technical use of reverse shooting found its compliment in the sound: the sound for the rubber band machine (when 'Bruno' enters the 'Zone') was recorded and played back in reverse.⁶⁴

There are also moments in this film where the sound track is almost silent, creating an aural vacuum that was also used to great effect in Institute Benjamenta and Rehearsals for Extinct Anatomies. This is a dramatic effect that unrelentingly pulls our attention to the image, and it can force us to engage with the image much more than when the music and sounds guide us, round out the image and define space. These moments are also ones of the third dialectic of spatial coherence and disjunction the Quays also use in their editing. At the beginning of the 'Screw Dance' or in the 'Dark Mutterings' sequence (with the pulley moving off into darkness there is an almost complete lack of sound, which also means the space is less defined. In his study of John Cage's engagement with silence as a musical form, Kahn suggests that "pitch, loudness and timbre, although they could be heard in musical sound, were not intrinsic to the being or nonbeing of music because they did not require duration, whereas 'silence cannot be heard in terms of pitch or harmony: it is heard in terms of time length'."⁶⁵ These almost silent shots and scenes embed the viewer in an immersive experience, because the temporality of these periods is experienced more intensely as the same as her own: without distractions or guidance of sound, noise

⁶⁴ Quay Brothers interview, 1996.

⁶⁵ Kahn, 1999, p. 181. Citation within quote is Cage, in Kostelanetz, 1970, p. 81

and music, and because there are very few camera movements in these quiet scenes, she is also more immersed in the shot's spatiotemporality. The viewer's (and listener's) work with these 'aural textures' encourage a sustained 'haptic hearing' and an anempathetic apprehension. The faint noise and sounds can also convey a sense of mood and space outside the frame, mutters and creaks, the sound of pulleys or an indiscernible voice that sounds very far away. In the 'Dark Muttering' sequence there is no music for an extended period and as the puppet looks into the dark space right of the apparatus he is in front of. The sounds and echoes suggest a deep vast space in the darkness and they are joined by crackling voices and murmurs that sound like (and are) old radio broadcasts, acousmatic sounds that are disembodied and disassociated from their human and spatial origins. This is an example of the third dialectic of spatial coherence and disjunction. It creates a sense of off-screen space that Noël Burch describes:

Off-screen sound, however, always brings off-screen space into play . . .
Even when there is no indication of the direction a sound is coming from .
. . . we are able to tell approximately how far away it is, and this distance
factor provides yet another parameter, though it is one that as yet has
seldom been explored.⁶⁶

But there is something else at play too. These sounds carry over without interruption or pause into the next dense sequence, the 'Metaphysical Museum', the puppet looks through a small window and his face and eye, in closeup, are intercut with scenes of metaphysical machines shot with varying focus pull and macro lenses: the rubber band machine, ice cubes reforming from pools of water, a dandelion clock's reconfiguration. Because the sound track continues during cuts and movement into new shots and scenes, the sense of coherent space these sounds belong to is undermined--they are shared by the dark recesses and the bright, sealed-off spaces of the metaphysical machines. This sequence is also another good example of 'shallow' sound. Costantini describes another sound strategy in the film that relates to spatial orientation, a strategy:

to make the relation between the sound and the sound source very
imprecise. Some objects produce ambiguous sound since it is not clear if

⁶⁶ Burch, 1981, pp. 26-27.

the noise is coming from the action or if it is coming from off-screen (in other words, if they are diegetic or non-diegetic).⁶⁷

The Street of Crocodiles soundtrack engenders in listeners an engagement with understanding the causes of sound they hear. Within the three listening modes: casual, semantic and reduced, Chion describes, "another kind of causal listening [in which] we do not recognise an individual, or a unique and particular item, but rather a category of human, mechanical, or animal cause".⁶⁸ Although they may be received as diegetic, the pulley sounds, squeaks, rustles and acousmatic sounds are often not specific to one item moving (or not) in the frame, and we develop what Chion calls "indices, particularly temporal ones, that we try to draw upon to discern the nature of the cause".⁶⁹ This category of causal listening is the one that hears the animated realm itself, the undercurrent vitalist pulse of Street of Crocodiles, of the metaphysical machines.

The film also uses acousmatic sound and music to elicit anticipation and anempathetic apprehension; sometimes a sound is heard long before we see the object it originates from. An example of this in a longer montage sequence in the 'Zone' (5:39-8:31). Throughout the sequence, we hear two connected sounds: an odd, bouncy, noise--a extended, pizzicato 'doiinnng' of what sounds like a low-tension rubber band being strummed, followed by repetitive, diminishing reverbration and thunks of what sounds like tensioned wooden parts released from pressure and colliding before returning to a static state. These sounds are first heard where the Boy causes screws to jump using the reflection of his mirror: as they fall to the floor their impact and bounce is acoustically synchronised with these two sounds. We hear the sounds again as Bruno enters through a side door, and again the sounds are synchronised with movements of what appear to be the sources of these sounds in neighbouring shop windows in the 'Zone'. On the left, a 'vomiting' puppet on his forward-moving trajectory in a shop window on the right on the left, an apparatus assembled of metal pipes in the left window 6:42-6:44. A fast pan shift then takes us to a macro shot of a pile of cracked, broken rubber bands, and then an eyeline match with Bruno reveals a third metaphysical machine--the 'Rubber Band Machine--that repeats a movement of stretching rubber bands until they break, and again the apparatus movements are snynchronised with the thunks. While Chion describes this later revealing of the sound's source as a dramatic technique that maintains

⁶⁷ Costantini, 2007.

⁶⁸ Chion, 1994, p. 27.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 27.

suspense, the synchronisation of these two noises. The 'doinng' and the thump--with the more than one source--falling screws, the metal pipe machine, the vomiting puppet and the rubber band machine--suggest complicity amongst the machines. This 'disembodied sound' is a metaphor for the metaphysical machines: it is the heartbeat of the vitalist world of the 'Zone' and the objects that populate it.

Kahn hints at the problematics around describing and interpreting a sound, actually a noise, such as this one: "The interesting problem arises when noise itself is being communicated, since it no longer remains inextricably locked into empiricism but is transformed into an abstraction of another noise."⁷⁰ Regardless of the material and technical sonic origins of this noise, because it takes place in a montage sequence that is almost silent for a long duration, no other music or sound softens or adds information about it. This heightens and emphasises its strangeness and its distinctness from the musical passages. I interpret this sound sequence as a further example of Chion's other causal listening where we recognise a "category of human, mechanical, or animal cause". In *Street of Crocodiles*, it is the category of an animistic cause, one that allows us to experience the Quays' animation of Schultz's fermentation of matter. This challenges Grodal's suggestion in Chapter 6 that viewers lose interest when visual representations of phenomena without anthropomorphic actants, because of lack of emotional motivation, because these sounds and others on the sound track stimulate artefact emotion and enchantment. This may explain the emotional fullness some viewers experience they feel when watching (and listening to) the Quays' non-anthropomorphic puppets.

We are not yet done with this unusual sound: the synchronisation of the camera movement with the breaking of the rubber band creates what Chion calls a "synch point" in the film, "a salient moment of audiovisual sequence during which a sound event and a visual event meet in synchrony."⁷¹ But this is not just a synchronisation between sound and image: the camera itself is implicated. As it films the scene of the metal pipe machine's movements, it jerks upward and shakily comes to rest a number of times in synch with the sound of the series of thunks and after the second time it does this, a brief fast pan cut takes us to a pile of broken rubber bans, one of which is just settling after its break and fall. This is a remarkable example of the Quays' invocation of the camera as the 'third puppet', because in those instances of synchronisation with the sound of the breaking rubber band, its point of view is transformed from omniscient and objective to subjective and actively, even

⁷⁰ Kahn, 2001, p. 25.

⁷¹ Chion, 1994, p. 58.

'physically' involved in the event it is filming. It continues throughout the rest of the sequence, much softer, as a violin and guitar are introduced and as the violin fades, the sounds increase again alongside the guitar plucking., and then both guitar and these two sounds give way to the sounds of pulley, that take us into the next sequence as 'Bruno' leaves the 'Zone'. And much later in the film (15:04) we hear it again when the Tailor beckons 'Bruno' to follow him into the back room and it continues into the shots where the boy encounters the naked puppet torso, this time synchronised with the Boy, who turns abruptly as if he has heard the sound behind him, sees the doll, and then with the camera as it does a fast pan shift upwards up to a closeup of its macabre, painted face . Although we associate that sound with the machine, and its image is implicated in the scene at hand, its strangeness at being included without an image of its source can incite what Chion calls "reduced listening, that "takes the sound...as itself the object to be observed instead of a vehicle for something else. . . . Reduced listening requires the fixing of sounds, which thereby acquire the status of veritable objects."⁷² This repetition of sound also conveys a sense of spatial orientation and assists the viewer to locate where we are in the labyrinth. It additionally gives the sequences a sense of temporality and narrative development, because we recall the moment when we heard the sounds first, and this throbbing and thudding sound is the animistic undercurrent of the 'Zone'.

Trilectic Montage

These indicative sequence analyses and explanations in this chapter are attempts to describe the inextricable melding of sound and image, which is a stylistic feature that is constant throughout the Quay Brothers' work. Street of Crocodiles' musical structure guides us spatially, intellectually, temporally and emotionally through its labyrinth. Kahn contends that "noises that are never just sounds . . . they are also ideas of noise. Ideas of noise can be tetchy, abusive, transgressive, resistive, hyperbolic, scientific, generative and cosmological."⁷³ The noises described in this chapter, and many others in the Quays' works, do indeed achieve these notably active attribute ideas of noise, most notably transgressive, hyperbolic, and cosmological. They are the aural conspirators that give voices to the Quays' vitalist cosmogony. Their montage of sound and image follows a method analogous to what Eisenstein terms the monistic ensemble in Japanese theatre in which "[s]ound--

⁷² Ibid., p. 29-30.

⁷³ Kahn, 2001, p. 20.

movement--space--voice . . . do not accompany (nor even parallel) each other, but function as elements of equal significance."⁷⁴ It also is an animated mise-en-scène of Artaud's hieroglyphic theatre, in which the repertoire of gesture and music create a kind of spiritual architecture made up not only of gestures and sign language but also of the evocative power of a rhythm, the musical quality of a physical movement, the parallel and admirably fused harmony of a tone."⁷⁵

Bearing a musical methodology in mind, there is one paragraph in "The Street of Crocodiles" in which Schulz refers to the inability of the text to transcribe the half-finished and undecided character of Street of Crocodiles because of the conclusive and established meaning of words--that words cannot describe adequately, because they are too fixed.⁷⁶ When asked how they approached this passage, their response explains how music becomes the secret scenario:

That intrigued us. Again, it's like divorcing--letting the image go beyond what the text could ever nail down so it has become more [pause] it is very hard to say 'it is a noun and a feminine case'. You can't say that about an image [laughter]. You can't nail it like that, it sort of drifts off and becomes like music.⁷⁷

This concept of the image drifting off and becoming like music finds its revelation--and its achievement--in the Quays' different montage techniques and poetic dialectics. In his discussion of Eisenstein's montage of attractions, André Bazin describes the common trait "which constitutes the very definition of montage, namely, the creation of a sense or meaning not objectively contained in the images themselves but derived exclusively from their juxtaposition."⁷⁸ He goes on to suggest that which happens to the two images is similar to what happens in language when we use metaphor, in other words, montage of attractions contains the essence of written metaphor when the idea is presented in visual images. Costantini suggests that

"[o]rdinary objects can acquire a remarkable quality when the shot invites us to see not the object but its shape and the sound design adds a sound

⁷⁴ Eisenstein, 1949, p. 20.

⁷⁵ Artaud, in Sontag, 1976, p 216.

⁷⁶ Schulz, 1977, 108-109.

⁷⁷ Quay Brothers interview, 1992.

⁷⁸ Bazin, 1967, p. 27.

that might be coming from this new status: we no longer think of the object in terms of its primary function. Now we see the associated new form and therefore we accept its new sound possibilities."⁷⁹

This 'new status' is the monistic ensemble Eisenstein describes where "sound, movement, space and voice do not accompany (or even parallel) one another but are treated as equivalent elements."⁸⁰ It is in part created by lingering takes of objects and spaces that give us time to hear the sound and understand it belongs to them and the film's 'world'. In keeping with the intention of montage of attractions, and recalling the explanation of the puppets' noncompossible, or portmanteau forms in Chapter 6, and the dialectics of discontinuity and spatial logic of direct connection between discontinuous space described in Chapter 7, we can extend the principles of juxtaposition to include the use of sound the Street of Crocodiles. The Quays say their impulse is much more a lyrical journey: "the metaphors are always musical."⁸¹ The film's visual and aural landscapes and soundscapes, freed of the semantic constrictures of spoken and written language, work with contrast and collision. Perhaps the Quays' system is not dialectic, but trilectic--if based on the analogy of the chord, 3 notes that sound simultaneously: A / C / F, A, A the sets, B, the puppets and objects, F is the music and sounds⁸². This triplectic results in the 'liquid space' of the Quays' films that contributes to what they describe as:

the very slow accretion of layers which combine to line and perpetuate one another. For us, [Jankowski's] music offered a conspiratorial climate in keeping with the Schulzian universe which effectively suspended time and allowed the music to secretly contaminate the images, the images to contaminate the music.⁸³

These layers are in effect the monistic ensemble of puppets, sets, camera techniques and sound, an ensemble that can be found at work in almost all the short films, from Street of Crocodiles or Rehearsals for Extinct Anatomies, The Comb or In Absentia, films that neither serve narrative motivation nor are they verisimilitudinous; they are neither dramatically nor psychologically motivated. The Quays diverge greatly from the still prevalent cinematic model for sound and image where sound design and

⁷⁹ Costantini, 2007.

⁸⁰ Eisenstein, 1988, p. 118.

⁸¹ Quays, 1986, p. 3.

⁸² I am indebted to Mark Bartlett for this analogy.

⁸³ Quay Brothers, 1986, p. 3.

production is often secondary to the visual image and dialogue. Underscored and counterpointed by emotional qualities of the music and sound, the Quay Brothers' films attain an aural poeticism unmatched in puppet animation, and this is a result of their both exacting and intuitive use of montage--but in a musical sense. The Quays acknowledge that the musicality of their work is a language of their own. Their explanation of the relationship between viewer, text, image and music:

If you can get the image to work at the state of where music is, it is a great, powerful intensity and state of mind, and yet at the same time you realise that it's for you only. The viewer can only create that state if he is drawn to that level. It would be something different for every single person.⁸⁴

This intent is achieved if we consider Michael Atkinson's observation: "Flamboyantly ambiguous, retroactively archaic, obeying only the natural forces of a purely occult consciousness, Quay films are secret, individuated knowledge for each and every viewer."⁸⁵

Besides the intense and ongoing collaboration with Jankowski, the Quay Brothers work with other composers on non-commercial or public-funded commissioned films. After Street of Crocodiles during the period of preparing the first feature film, the Quays began collaborating with contemporary musicians, commissioned to create visual tracks for pop music promos. In interviews, these musicians state they were attracted to the Quays' work in film, especially for their surreal and poetic qualities.⁸⁶ These musicians' wish to work with the Quays may lie in what the Quays have said themselves that is a central method in their work: that 'the essential influence is that of a visual aesthetic which doesn't rely upon dialogue.⁸⁷ We will see that nowhere is this more impressive than in their approach to the musical score of In Absentia that was composed by Karlheinz Stockhausen. Yet other collaborations ensued that had music as a centrality of their aesthetics: ballet, dance and opera began to infiltrate the Quay Brothers' creative works.

⁸⁴ Quay Brothers interview, 1994.

⁸⁵ Atkinson, 1994, p. 36.

⁸⁶ <http://www.16horsepower.com/video/vision1998.html>,
http://www.fembot.com/content/live/97-09-05/chat/Penn,_Michael.html,
<http://www.triskaidekaphobia.com/one.php/one/hnia/10/>

⁸⁷ Deussing, 1996.

Chapter 9. The Animated Frame and Beyond

The critical success of Street of Crocodiles gave the Quays an artistic freedom to explore a shift in subject matter, in part originating from literary and poetic sources that led to exploration of new aesthetic forms, but also because they were able to make extensive experiments in technique, both with cameras and on other stage sets. The Quay Brothers are best known for their puppet and feature length films and other works of time-based media. Less known, but no less incisive in their creative development is their intense engagement in stage design for opera, ballet and theatre: since 1988, the Quays have created sets and projections for performing arts productions on international stages. Reasons for the relative unfamiliarity of many readers with this work lie in the obvious discipline and dissemination differences inherent in film and live performance; another is the geographic and scheduling limitations of staged performance, and the specialist press and smaller audience access to these ephemeral, non-reproducible events. Yet the Quays' creative works in arts other than cinema had and continue to have a remarkable impact on their filmmaking, as their work in performance staging translates remarkably well to the small scale of puppet animation and set design for the two feature films.

This chapter explores the separate, but inseparable interweaving of the prevailing small scale and emerging grand scale worlds of the films and stage designs after 1986. The emphasis is on their cinematic work, including music videos and commercials, but I aim to convey the close-knit interplay between choreographers, actors and costume designers who the Quays work with in their film projects as they progressed towards live-action filmmaking. Unlike the relative ease of viewing films in cinemas and on other formats, these performance productions were intermittently staged around the world and access to critical review or other materials remains a formidable challenge. I had the good fortune to see a number of these performances: the stage play of Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream (Jonathan Miller, 1996), an opera, Mazeppa (Richard Jones, 1991) and the ballet Queen of Spades (Kim Brandstrup, 2001). In all of the performances, the Quays were commissioned to integrate architectural, narrative and decorative elements into the large sets and occasionally included animation projections. Because these contributions to live performance are mostly limited to the stage designs, my reflections concentrate on specific features of the set designs and their interrelationship with the films that were being made concurrently during this

period. I seek to indicate metonymic indices of devices and aesthetic features in the work that elucidate the Quays' shifting realities between the vitalist worlds of the puppet animation films and the corporeal cinematic presence of living bodies.

Rehearsals and Oneironautics

The Quays' enduring interest in Franz Kafka's writings and diaries took on form in the film that followed Street of Crocodiles that originated in a project called Three Scenes of Kafka, for which Jankowski had already composed the music. Rehearsals For Extinct Anatomies (1987), the Quay Brothers' first international co-production, fully exploits the play with the vitalist experiments they began to make in Street of Crocodiles. The Quays regard this film as the most musical and abstract of the shorts, and it is an apt title for one of the least narrative films from the Quays. Rehearsals for Extinct Anatomies is a fourteen minute long composition of tracking shots that travel between set fragments. Visually, it is a collection of austere spaces and idiosyncratic objects--metaphysical machines--loosely knit together more by technical and spatial aspects of the camera's point-of-view than by any narrative source, a combination of the prosaic and poetic. One is a darkened room lined with striped fabric that literally flows from the walls that is populated by two slow-moving or mostly immobile puppets, one reclining and one sitting. The white Classicism of the two flanking spaces, a playground for bizarre puppets, balls and metal forms is invaded by animated, stark calligraphic lines that, transmogrifying in form between ink, wool thread and curved wire springs, climb walls and traverse floors. It is exactly in this existential sense of the events of nothingness that the 'action' of the Quays' elliptic narrative takes place. There are other spaces, small theatres, and these are populated by strange puppets and objects. One of these, modelled on an anonymous specimen to which the film is dedicated (along with the London Underground), has a pitted and rough deformed head perched on a tangle of metal wire with a single malicious eye fixed in a slightly deranged stare and has a single long and coarse black hair protruding out of a soft, spongy mole on its forehead. Fascinating and repelling enough in itself, in repeated close-ups a stick prods the mole in a circular motion. The sense of discomfort and revulsion which this isolated, otherwise invisible gesture evokes is part of the fascination: simultaneously drawn to the neurotic repetition and relieved that it takes place on screen but not on one's own body, we are freed to gaze voyeuristically at this iris shot of the puppet's obsessive behaviour. Montage sequences then provide clues to these almost unbearable yet fascinating

macro lens close-ups. Extreme focus pulls are made in almost every scene, creating the effect of landscapes revealed when travelling through fog, sometimes to the extent that forms become grey and white toned, blurred abstract forms without outline. In another set, the two human-like puppets, strangely familiar in stature and gesture from earlier films, wait for--what? Perhaps for an illness to run its course, perhaps not. The oppressive kafkaesque atmosphere is momentarily relieved with a existential Beckettian humouresque, the sitting puppet scratches his head in the same gesture as the one-eyed wire homunculus. Atkinson captures the film's mood:

But nowhere is the tension between psychological translation of any stripe and the Quays' ferocious hermeticism more tangible than in Rehearsals For Extinct Anatomies, their starkest and most oblique film, free as it is of any (discernible) relationship with outside source material--a surprising move, coming on the heels of the attention-getting Crocodiles.¹

It was also a place for more play and for trying out new stylistic elements--high-key lighting, blurred animated balls swinging at dizzying frequency, Expressionistic decors and meandering musical scores that occasionally lapse into silence, highlight the set design--some of these already familiar elements will reappear in future films. Rehearsals for Extinct Anatomies is the Quay's most cinematically self-reflexive film, in which even the camera is subjected to experiments. In one shot we see one of the Quays moving around in the background, adjusting the set and at one point, hitting a ball attached to a string to set it swinging on a blurred arc and then holding it still, revealing their 'tricks' like playful magicians. In some sequences, the camera is sent on restless, geometrically organised horizontal, perpendicular and planar tracks and pans that continually change the sets' perspective and spatial relations. In one scene, its POV is step-arc'd in the same way as the ball. Using bright lights and a long exposure gave this effect a luminous, blurred quality, and this technique was prominent in the pop promos and in In Absentia. Underlying the entire film is a music track from Leszek Jankowski, also mysterious and hermetic, embellished by whispered monologues that hint at seduction or the disparate and unconnected, elliptical experience of solitude, like a one-sided phone conversation.²

¹ Atkinson, 1994, p. 39.

² One wonders if the Quay Brothers were familiar with Jean Cocteau's 1927 play "La voix humaine" a stage monologue for a single actress that was staged as a one-sided phone conversation with an absent departing lover

The Quays' interest in dance--and dancers--that was to eventually emerge in the live action dance films was first expressed in stage design for a ballet a year after Rehearsals was finished. Their first ballet collaboration was with choreographer Kim Brandstrup and he was to become a long-time collaborator on the Quays' later film projects; in turn, they contributed to his dance productions. Brandstrup studied film at the University of Copenhagen and thereafter choreography at the London Contemporary Dance School. His awareness of cinema and his concern with narrative are two reasons why his affiliation with the Quays has proven so fruitful. Dybbuk, directed and choreographed by Brandstrup, premiered at The Place in London, 1988 as one of three performances for the London Contemporary Dance Theatre's "New Worx" dance programme. In his 1990 review of a later performance, Clement Crisp's remarks on the performance and stage design reveals the complimentary nature of the collaboration, both in terms of Eastern European set motifs and a choreographic style that bears comparison with the Quays' puppet performances:

In a brilliant UFA-style set of a grotesquely leaning interior (The Drawing Room of Dr Caligari) by the Brothers Quay, to an accompaniment of Romanian folk-music, we see the heroine, Leah, prepared by her family for an arranged marriage . . . Through the most direct means, with repetitions of movement, mimetic austerities, Brandstrup builds up tension to the final moment when Channon finally possess Leah.³

The work with performers and human-scale set design on the projects gave them the unique opportunity to engage with builders, carpenters, costume designers and actors that proved valuable experience for the live-action shoot. The technical and architectural skills required for small-scale set design translated well to larger dimensions.

The engagement with performance shifted to include other genres, and the next was to be opera. The Quays were commissioned for stage design for The Love for Three Oranges (Sergei Prokofiev), directed by enfant terrible Richard Jones, and it premiered a year after Dybbuk at Opera North Leeds in 1989.⁴ The Quays developed a deeper working relationship with Jones and created stage design for A Flea in Her Ear (Georges Feydeau) in 1989 and in 1992, the third engagement with Jones was

³ Crisp, 1990.

⁴ The production toured thereafter, including at the English National Opera (ENO) in London 1989 and was revived in 1990.

designing sets for Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme (Molière), that was performed at the London Royal National Theatre in 1992. In his review for *City Limits*, Ian Shuttleworth described the set as "a great monochrome etching of a set (complete with 20-legged virginals) [that] draws applause but is soon revealed as a baroque folly which strands even the large Comédie performance style in a breathtakingly pretty canyon."⁵

In the 90s the work in film began a reorientation towards their immersion in developing the feature film project and to their increasing involvement in dance, opera and theatre.

Though the puppet films hadn't prepared us for the social aspect of ensemble work, we'd worked in theater and opera before . . . so we knew the value of collaboration, and we realized that we'd have to stop mumbling between ourselves and make ourselves intelligible to our team.⁶

The Quays had started to work on a feature film project, and The Comb (From the Museums of Sleep) (1990), their next completed film, was a short that developed initial imagery and narrative structure for the feature. The Comb is the first film that features a live-action female protagonist (Joy Constantinides, who was one of the dancers in Brandstrup's Dybbuk). In the previous films there were five female puppet figures in total, four in Street of Crocodiles: three tailor's assistants and a torso in the hall of glass, and one in Rehearsals. This reflects the Quays' increasing interest in dance companies where women performers or choreographers dominate (Pina Bausch, Rosa de Keersmaker), in contrast to theatre and to the literary sources they had been drawing on in the past in which the majority of figures are male. In the film, the actress's movements are shot both in live action and animation, especially the close-ups and small gestures of a hand, a closed eye, a twitching finger, a thumbnail running along the teeth of a comb: some of the visual tropes here reappear later in the gestures, character, sensuality and framing of Lisa Benjamenta. The dancer's performance is restricted to restless movements during fitful sleep in subtle choreographies that emphasise the textures of fabric and skin.

The Comb is loosely inspired by Robert Walser's short story "Guide Through the Museum of Sleep" and other texts that revisit fairy tales, notably the Snow White genre. With its ethereal mood and emotional underpinning, Jankowski's score

⁵ Shuttleworth, Ian. "Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme", 1992.

⁶ Nichols Goodeve, 1996, 84.

highlights the Quays' visual interpretation of Walser's musical tropes. Careful cross-cutting between these shots suggests an oneiric relation between the sleeper and the puppet: The erratic movement of the sleeping woman's finger is repeated by a puppet's overlong middle finger, and her shifts, sighs and twitches trigger actions in the animated realm. The combination of live-action and animation is at its starkest here, and a harrowing journey of oneiric sleep haunts the film's impossible architecture. The Quays' consistent use of focus pull in The Comb underpins their particular concept of spatial incoherence that was discussed in Chapter 7. The film's development of linked, yet distinct 'worlds' uses a familiar method--animated dreamscape sequences in colour, black and white live-action sequences that inter punctuate the film--creating a melange of ladders, anamorphic landscapes and painted backgrounds, seamlessly constructed into a credible yet impossible arrangement, their dialectics of spatial connectedness and disconnectedness. A moving focal plane used in uncanny point of view shots assists the spatial transitions between dreamer and dream world. Following on thematically from Nocturna Artificialia or Street of Crocodiles, The Comb deals with shifting levels of consciousness in which visual and temporal shifts are bracketed and further developed by shifts in the musical score and sound track. The Quays: "Crocodiles was prose, it has a very literary feel, almost novelistic, but . . . Rehearsals was very [much] like writing poetry, and doing The Comb was trying to court both these worlds."⁷ As well, the stylistic elements of the two realms are very distinct. Composed by Lezek Jankowski, the music was completed before the images. The Quays were in Poland, accompanying a travelling programme of films, and he gave them a tape that was to become the music for The Comb. This was to be the last short animation film commission from Channel Four for the Quays until 2000. Funding was reallocated and there was less room for experimentation, and the 'Renaissance' of auteur animation film that this channel had so marvellously initiated at the beginning of the decade came to an end for many independent British filmmakers.

Opera and Artificial Perspectives

Continuing to prepare the feature film script, 1991 was a year of involvement in new media and production genres: three BBC station graphic interludes, an arts documentary on the painting technique of anamorphosis and continuation of their work in opera with Richard Jones. Mazeppa (Peter Tchaikovsky) premiered 1991 at

⁷ Interview in: Wright, 1994, p. 45.

the Bregenzer Festspiele Theatre Festival, Bregenz. Mazeppa was an extremely colourful set that integrated large-scale replicas of the trams familiar from Nocturna Artificialia, Igor--The Paris Years Chez Pleyel and The Cabinet of Jan Svankmajer. (A motif in many of the puppet animation films, trams continued to be prominent in the Quay Brothers' work. Mexican artist Frida Kahlo was injured in a streetcar accident, and in Julie Taymor's film Frida, the Quays' animated sequence (Stille Nacht V) is inserted at this point in the film, and for the first feature, the Quays said of Institute Benjamenta that it "seems to be positioned in a city traversed by trams."⁸ The Mazeppa stage itself was on a slight upwards angle towards the back of the stage from the front of the proscenium. The walls were also at an angle leaning into the stage, embellished with strong diagonal black and white graphics and wooden windows protruding from them--a version of this design resurfaces in the entry to Lisa Benjamenta's crypt. The stage was littered with angular long pieces of wood propping each other up, and the wires and cable from the tram formed a disorienting tangle above the stage.

The experience the Quays gained making the artists' biographies over the years filters through in their next film. De Artificiali Perspectiva, or Anamorphosis (1991) is akin to a biography of a painterly technique of illusion predominant in the sixteenth century. The project was a joint venture of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the J. Paul Getty Trust Programme for Art on Film, produced by Koninck Studios. Again, the studio provides some clues: it is filled with bookshelves weighted down by antiquaria and paperbacks. Leafing through them one finds again and again reference to early optical studies and cabbalistic science, and Zielinski's 'Magiae Naturalis' mentioned in the introduction. Anamorphosis is a film-historical documentary on the eponymous technique of subverting vision. Despite its documentary nature, because of the aesthetic complexity of this technique the Quays' visual style dominates this film, and it has a great affinity to the subject. Illusion and subversion of perception is a central element in their works, and although the film concentrates on this particular painting technique, it illuminates the development of later precursors to cinematic techniques of illusion. The experiments in optics that were popularised by the development and marketing of Victorian optical toys and parlour objects is paralleled in the film by its description of how the people commissioning the paintings used them in social settings to impress their friends. Using a selection of artworks, from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (including a chair by Jean François Nicéron (c.1638), two woodcuts by Erhard Schön

⁸ Nichols Goodeve, 1996, p. 84.

(c.1535), and one of the best-known examples of the technique the painting The Ambassadors (1533) by Hans Holbein the Younger), the film demonstrates and interprets these illusory techniques.⁹ An informative and playful documentary, the Quays' talents as illustrators and calligraphers were given free rein in the titles and set design. Besides the images trawled from the history of this technique of painting, the Quays designed some of their own anamorphic images and objects that were used in the film (Niceron's chair), and it was a trying ground for the technique's use in the set design that figures prominently in Institute Benjamenta. One of the scenes in Anamorphosis resurfaces almost identically in the feature--a long corridor, with a door on the right hand side, is decorated with an anamorphic painting of rutting deer.

The Quays directed the film and worked closely with art historian Roger Cardinal (whose strong interest in Art Brut was also to find implementation in later films) on the script. The Quays: "He had a brilliant sense of economy to allow the images to breathe. We told him about the images we were aiming for, and he had a sense of where to position the text, where the images fell."¹⁰ The film uses now familiar stylistic tactics: monochrome and colour realms, fast pan shifts, a choreographed camera, chiaroscuro lighting, focus pull and macro lenses. Rather than the lateral hierarchy of sound, music, image, movement and lighting prevalent in most of the shorts, because of the narrative continuity and aural dominance of a descriptive voiceover Anamorphosis is a rare film in their body of works. Jankowski's score is almost completely composed of harmonious and commentative harps, acoustic guitar plucks and strums, with minimal digression from its function to accompany and underpin the imagery. It does become edgier, uncontrolled, in the uncommented, voice-free graphic and other interludes.

The didactic elements are separated by graphic intertitles and often introduced by views through a peephole or velvet and gild proscenium stage curtains rising. A collection of flat paper and ink puppets in a brightly lit space perform demonstrations of anamorphosis processes. Our guide in the film is an anthropomorphic, noncompossible puppet composed of doll parts and multiple thick framed window and camera frames on its arms chest and face—as much a machine as the apparati that it serves and uses in its quest to understand the technique's principles. Its luminous glass eyes lead our gaze into the apertures and openings onto the works of art--paintings, drawings, woodcuts, objects. Sir Ernst

⁹ Art on Screen database.

¹⁰ Quay Brothers interview, 2003.

Gombrich acted as an art consultant and both he and Cardinal were members of an academic board set up by the Getty Trust. These illustrious art historians' participation ensured that the film would be received outside of the animation critics' community. It was shown on art channels and remains listed in art course curricula.¹¹ A synopsis from the Art Film Website is unusual in that there is no mention of the Quays' style--it foregrounds the subject:

Animation techniques elucidate the illusional art of anamorphosis, a method of visual distortion whereby an image is presented in confused and distorted form. When looked at from a different angle or in a curved mirror, the distorted image appears in normal proportions. Using a puppet as master of ceremonies, the animators demonstrate the basic effects of anamorphosis and reveal the hidden meanings that lurk within. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the practice of creating anamorphic images was an outgrowth of artists' experiments with rendering perspective.¹²

Anamorphosis is categorised in the Art on Screen Database as a visual essay and suggested for use at university level:

The Quays began to actively engage with conceptual plans for a live-action feature film (both features will be discussed in Chapter 9). Walser's writing had inspired The Comb, and his texts, especially Institute Benjamenta (published in German as Jakob von Gunten in 1909), found their way into the initial treatments and drafts. This was the period when they began making the Stille Nacht shorts, a series of short films (five at the time of writing). One, however, had a different purpose. The Quays were busy creating new imagery for the planned film's sombre fairy-tale mood when it was in planning stages and an indication of the 'soul' of Institute Benjamenta. To experiment with some of the new ideas they had, the Quays made (and funded) a short film, a preamble for the feature--Stille Nacht III: Tales From the Vienna Woods [Ich bin im Tod erblüht] was made in 1993, and it was used to pitch the feature to potential funders. It is one of the first films that integrates Bavarian ornaments and sylvan settings, and features a bullet projectile passing through branches in a stylised forest, hitting pine cones and navigating tree trunks before

¹¹ Anamorphosis won an honourable mention at the American Film & Video Festival in 1992, and was nominated for an award at the British Academy of Film/Television Arts Animation Category in the same year.

¹² See Art on Screen database for the full record.

coming to rest in an interior with a long table with stylised antler legs. They described these objects in an interview with Rust Grey:

The anamorphic table with the antlers and multiple legs is one of those 'bachelor machines' you imagine exist in some fictional museum. At night, these objects repeatedly dream [and] replay their former circumstances for having arrived here in this museum. [...] They are only alive at night remorselessly tied to a single dream--it's a permanent death that they rehearse over and over again.¹³

The film ends (or begins again) when a hand appears and picks up the bullet. We hear the sound of shooting and the bullet repeats its course, setting off into the woods again. The themes and motifs the Quays suggest above are integrated in the feature. After Koninck secured funding, the short was segmented into animated sequences and some were inserted in the feature film.

Atelier Koninck QBFZ: Stilles Nächte and Commercial Interludes

After completing *Anamorphosis* in 1991, the Quay Brothers' interests turned increasingly to dance and ballet, interspersed with new types of commissions that allowed them to exploit some of the new stylistic experiments in the realm of public television beyond Channel 4. Since its inauguration in the early 80s, the music station MTV made a major contribution to increasing independent animation literacy and exposure for millions of receptive viewers. In the meantime, spin-off music broadcasters have become a familiar mainstay of the 15-30 age bracket of viewers, but when it first began broadcasting, MTV was a phenomenon that dramatically changed the way people watched animation. The main impetus came from MTV Europe's recruitment of Peter Dougherty as Creative Director 1990-2001, whose interest in animation was instrumental in giving many independent animators around the world access to a wide and young animation-receptive audience. Dougherty sought contact with independents, giving them commissions to help create an attractive identity for his channel. The Quays' work with Dougherty and MTV gave them access to a mature audience that was interested in animation in its many forms. By commissioning relatively underexposed but highly talented animation filmmakers the likes of Jerzy Kucia, Susan Young, Phil Mulloy, Run

¹³ In Rust Gray, p. 6.

Wrake and the Quays, MTV became a platform for new as well as established animation artists who no longer had access to the relative financial comfort and artistic freedom of Channel Four funding.

Besides incorporating vast quantities of animation in its corporate identity, MTV realised that the combination of animation and music allowed a completely different form of musical interpretation than do taped concerts and live appearances. MTV created new identities for musicians, and part of this identity was to use highly innovative music video as a marketing and publicity vehicle. The Quays collaborated on one of the most ground-breaking early animated pop promos: Peter Gabriel's Sledgehammer (1987), directed by Stephen R. Johnson and animated by a collection of animators including Aardman's Nick Park.¹⁴ The producers brought together a group of young and promising animators to work in the project and had the prescience to make a documentary of the process. Gabriel has a preference for animation and later a compilation video was released which included his music videos, documentaries and interviews. But it remains the most un-Quay-ish work to date, and, collaborating with a host of other filmmakers on different segments, they had little freedom to express their own ideas beyond an Archimboldo-esque sequence with fruit. The next music-related commission gave them more artistic licence.

The Quays had started making commercials produced by Griffiths and Koninck Studios and soon realised that, since the commercials were commissioned and increasingly produced by a company delegate, it was time to adapt accordingly. Griffiths continued to run Koninck Studios and in 1988 the Quays formed a new company, Koninck QBFZ that was also the production company for a number of shorts. The first in the ongoing series of Stille Nacht shorts, Stille Nacht I (Dramolet) (1988) is an 80-second black and white MTV Art Break distinct from the other high-energy shorts commissioned for this series. In the film, a puppet sits straight-backed in front of a table at a wall, small, a bowl in front of it. Bent spoons work their way through the wall around it and what looks like soft metallic fur begins to move and pulsate in a circular motion. The camera grazes over these surfaces, lingering on textures and creating vignettes of strange objects and movements, creating an extremely soft haptic feel--as do the monochrome sepia colours of the puppet and the set. The 'fur' travels into the bowl, eliciting a nod to Meret Oppenheim's fur-lined teacup. The next short commission was Ex-Voto made in 1989, with music composed by Jankowski. It used devotional icons and eerie landscapes to communicate

¹⁴ The segment they worked on is well documented in Roger Noake's Animation: A Guide to Animated Film Techniques.

environmentalism, in keeping with MTV's FREE YOUR MIND series of themed station breaks. The Quays' visual style also attracted other stations and organisations to commission station interludes. The BFI commissioned a cinematic logo that appeared on a number of films; a film leader that was added as leader for current productions and used to identify the BFI before the film began. It even appears on some of the Quays' own films. The BBC commissioned them to do three short idents for the channel: The Calligrapher Parts I, II, III, 1991, a total of 1 minute, but they were never broadcast as idents.

The Quay Brothers' growing presence in a wider reception area generated commissions from music groups for the music videos. Stille Nacht II: Are We Still Married? (1992) is a music video commissioned by 4AD for the 'His Name is Alive'. The band had originally wanted to use excerpts from existing films ¹⁵ Shot in black and white, the film uses motifs from Lewis Carroll's Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and is the tale of a rabbit, a little girl and a ping pong ball. The experiments they had made with lighting and animating the ping pong ball will inform the lighting effects in Institute Benjamenta and In Absentia. The film commences with a shot that is based on the simple phenomenon of a thaumatrope, a heart-shaped flat form with eyes on one side and a regalia-type icon on the other that is later held in the main puppet's hand. An animated, blurred white ball rotates around this object and then flies itchily through the shots, and its vibrations set the main figure, an Alice-like doll, in motion. Positioned in front of a wall with many windows, her ankles extend, in a rhythm of breathing, and the object in her hand is used as a bat for what seems to be the film's main actions--a metaphysical ping-pong game, played by her, the rabbit and other objects in the space. Iris shots, extreme close-ups and focus pulls familiar from earlier films are joined by multiple exposures that multiply the rabbit as, defying gravity, it stands on the wall. The sets of exterior walls with windows and a figure with its legs swinging is also repeated in the latter film. In 1993, the Quays accepted an unusual commission, a music video for Michael Penn. The music for the 1993 music video for Michael Penn Long Way Down (Look What the Cat Drug In), doesn't evoke any of the eerie qualities of their work and in terms of the relationships between sound and image is an isolated piece of work in their filmography. The same year they were commissioned again by AD4 for a second pop promo for 'His Name is Alive'. Stille Nacht IV: Can't Go Wrong Without You (1994) reworks some of the imagery from the past promo they did for the band.

¹⁵ Brookes, undated.

The Quay Brothers' own filmography lists these films firstly as Stille Nacht films, followed by the song title. This is indicative of their intentions of these works being part of a larger aesthetic and stylistic concept. In a letter to Michel Atkinson, they reply to his inquiry on the Stille Nacht pieces:

They're all linked by the common thread of Black & White and the belief in oblique salesmanship. Stille Nacht I was selling steel wool. Stille Nacht II was selling ping pong balls or socks with one vocation in life. Stille Nacht III was trying to sell pre-anamorphosised reindeer dining tables with a bullet already fixed in one testicle (which even more accurately & obliquely explains the deformed antlers) (documentary hyperbole). Of course none of all this is really apparent, but it gives us the sublime belief that no one is ever looking. And it's the premise we're most comfortable in starting from.¹⁶

None of these are directly selling anything; they are either station breaks or music videos in which they have full artistic control (Stille Nacht I, II and IV). But in their remarks the Quays are aware of the unavoidable commercialism inherent in commissioned film, of the ravenous machine, which needs its pound of consumer-trimmed flesh. Yet the music-driven quality of these shorts resulted in fruitful explorations and certain freedoms that had consequences for their later independent films. Costa regards the Quay Brothers' work on pop promos as "the first drafts, notebooks, sketches for atmospheres that the animators will develop (or dump) in subsequent projects."¹⁷

During this period, theatre director Jonathan Miller, who had seen Street of Crocodiles, requested a set design like the film's glass room sequence for his production of William Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream, staged at London's Almeida Theatre, London in 1996. Miller set the play in the 1930s and the colouring and lighting of the stage design was similar to the chiaroscuro and brown and yellow colouring of the film. Critic Geoffrey O'Brien:

Here was the driest possible reimagining of a play capable of being smothered in ornate fancies: a Dream without fairies or fairy bowers, without even a hint of woodland magic or, indeed, of woodland. In place

¹⁶ Atkinson, 1994, p. 37.

¹⁷ Costa, 2001, p. 46.

of palatial pomp and natural wonderland, there is an unchanging set (designed by the animation specialists the Quay Brothers) consisting of rows of receding glass fronts, like an abandoned arcade, and permitting endless variations on the entrances and exits in which the play abounds.¹⁸

The 'hide and seek' theme was well served by the set, and its arcade-like design was similar to the Hall of Mirrors in Street of Crocodiles. Actors moved through doors, were visible through rows of dusty perpendicular glass sheets that were set at varying intervals on the depth of the stage or, otherwise out of sight, were seen by reflections off mirrors strategically placed in the set. The stage design worked remarkably well for this frolicking Shakespeare comedy that is part whimsical, part myth and fairy tale, and set in a world of dream that takes place supernatural, almost metaphysical settings. Word about the Quay Brothers' unusual set and stage design circulated, and they were approached by Simon McBurney, co-founder of the Complicité theatre group when it began in 1983. Directed by McBurney, Ionesco's The Chairs premiered at the Bath Theatre Royal in 1997, 40 years after its English premiere at London's Royal Court. McBurney's working methods to approach the absurd qualities of the play reveal qualities similar to the Quays' attempts at transforming literary inspirations into visual imagery. McBurney:

Out of the absurd mire of Ionesco's language we had to painstakingly unearth a sober sense before we could then let ourselves loose on the ridiculous, and transform it once more. We had to find a common language with Ionesco, which could be transformed into theatre."¹⁹

The play toured England and went to New York in 1998, where the Quays won the Drama Desk Award for Best Design. It comes as no surprise that McBurney's Complicité staged The Street of Crocodiles, a production based on Bruno Schulz's stories that began as a workshop for the company and evolved turned into a co-production with the National Theatre in London.

The Quays also did a pop promo for the group 16 Horsepower 'Black Soul Choir', in 1996. In black and white, moving between a stage set and animated realms, it featured a choreographed piece of chalk leaving its trails on a blackboard familiar from Institute Benjamenta. Instead of animating the entire film, shots of the band

¹⁸ O'Brien, 1997.

¹⁹ <http://www.complicite.org/productions/detail.html?id=14#toured>

playing were interspersed with animated vignettes, and the band played in front of background projections of small chalk pyramids. The white chalk is later joined by a piece of black, and the flowing forms that these two cavorting monochromatic objects develop into a wide range of greys, bearing affinities with Walter Ruttmann's flowing forms in Lichtspiel Opus 1 (1921). Clouds of chalk dust that rise from the stage set echo the glowing chalk dust of the games played by Institute Benjamenta's students in the corridors. The film's actions do not in any way follow the music's rhythms--they are independent. Their most recent pop promo commission was a 'Sparklehorse' clip featuring Tom Waits: Stille Nacht V: Dog Door (2001) re-uses some of the imagery from Stille Nacht III--the anamorphic room, the table and lighting and colour is similar. The film features a voyeuristic fox/dog and a shiny doll spreadeagled on a table covered only at her groin by frothy lace: rich colours bleed into the prevailing blackness, and the camera effects, jagged multiple exposures and close-ups of throbbing, soft fold of fabric insinuate a morbid eroticism. In the last minute of the film, gentle music replaces the hard edged music and voice of Tom Waits, and an intertitle 'On n'est jamais trop Jeune pour être Débauché(e)' precedes lingering shots of fabric folds and crescendoing glass ampoules. The Rotterdam Film Festival on-line archive contains the following synopsis:

Originally a music video for a song by Sparklehorse, and at the same time a perverted variation on fairytales like those of Fontaine, a childlike and innocent homage to the painting 'Origine du monde' by Gustave Courbet and a funny satire on the fashionable music video. A puppet show filled with unashamed eroticism and rebellious repetition.²⁰

The Quays' pop promos provided them with an opportunity to access a wide audience on music stations. Their films were emulated by other pop video directors, most notably Fred Stuhr for the band 'Tool'. But this wasn't the only option available to them to reach wider audiences.

Like other successful animators, numerous commercials punctuate the Quay Brothers' filmography. Because of its ability to compress ideas and create visual puns, animation has always held a special attraction for advertising. Besides providing a substantial income, commercials are also the 'playing ground' for trying out new ideas or to generate commercial income from of imagery created for independent shorts. While they worked with freelance producers, the commercial

²⁰ Synopsis, International Film Festival Rotterdam, 2002.

commissions came in partly as a result of Griffith's promotion of the films within the UK--critics, film commissioners and advertising professionals tend to gather in the bars, screening houses and pubs around Wardour Street in London's Soho, the heart of the film making industry in the UK, and they were recommended initially by word of mouth. Things picked up very quickly for the twins, and they could afford to be selective:

Commercials just fly in out of nowhere and if you are free and it is interesting, you do it. We turned down some because they were ridiculous, you couldn't do anything with them, or if we were doing another project. But usually they are pretty interesting--they invariably know our work, so there isn't really any competition. And usually they've written it for us and then if we are given free hand, we go for it.²¹

The unique signature style they had developed over the years began to be lucrative in commercials' marketing strategies, which also gained them access to a wider public, albeit in the form of promoting a product. In contrast to the pop promos, Costa regards the Quay Brothers' commercials as "the least exciting aspect of their work" and proposes that in the world of advertising "the Quays serve as extravagant artisans, not artists".²² They also had the opportunity to direct actors in a number of live-action scenarios (Doritos and Murphy's). The twins also did commercials for Nikon, Pitney Works, Coca Cola, BBC2, Slurpee, Honeywell Computers, Round Up Weed Killer (three) and Northern Rock (three). Some commercials were made available on the believemedias company website.²³ A selection of them is briefly described here as representative indicators of the kind of commercial work they were engaging in.

ICI Woodcare initiated a campaign for Dulux Wood Protection, and the Quays made a short commercial that used materials, surfaces and colours all reminiscent of the qualities of wood. Shot in colour, but treated to have a brown, yellow and beige effect, the film's colour scheme is reminiscent of some of their earlier films. The puppets and sets are constructed entirely of pieces of wood, have an angular quality. The film becomes what looks like a billboard and the commercial is appended by a live-action shot of a dog (Dulux's mascot in most of their commercials) that approaches the billboard and sits in front of it. The Walker 'Skins' Crisps commercial is

²¹ Quay Brothers interview, 2003.

²² Costa, 2001.

²³ See Believemedias website.

probably the least Quay-ish of the animated commercials. In a living room that makes style references to a 50s domestic setting, two puppets are watching TV and eating crisps. The commercial has some faint similarities with the artists' documentary shorts in terms of the colours and the bright lighting and also in the angular design of the walls and objects, but otherwise there is very little in the film's style that suggests it was made by the Quays.

The Quays had more opportunities to work in live action when they made a commercial for 'Doritos' crisps. Shot in a cinema, it features a young boy sitting in the front row of a raised balcony, a woman who arrives in the cinema late, a projectionist visible through the window of the projection booth, a couple watching the film and an usherette. There is no animation in the film. The Murphy's Instant Stout commercial 'Warriors' was both a homage and a parody of Akira Kurosawa's The Seven Samurai (the Quays are long-time admirers of Kurosawa) and shot in live-action on black-and-white film stock. It begins with an extreme long shot in the outdoors, and a group of samurai come running over the Irish countryside. Tension rises and ultimately they arrive at a local pub, satisfying their thirst with a swig of Murphy's beer. The French mineral water company Badoit also commissioned two commercials. In the first, the narrative basis is Aesop's fable of 'The Fox and the Crow'. The two animals, quite realistic in their puppet design, converse in French. The crow is perched in a tree made of the spiky blooms of Scottish thistles and the fox sits on the ground. They are in a 'natural' picnic setting. The film is brightly lit and the only stylistic hint that this is a Quay film is that the armatures of the fox are exposed. The second commercial is similar to the first, only this time a zebra introduces a mangy lion to the pleasures of Badoit mineral water. The setting is a dry, savannah-like open space. Again, there are few indications that the film carries any trademark of the Quay Brothers' signature style. The only element that could be suggested is the moment when the zebra begins painting stripes on the lion's belly in a beautiful striped pattern that are a reminder of the Quays' background in illustration.

The Quays' studio equipment was enhanced with a new technology: the blue glow of computer screens, digital cameras and state of the art equipment joined the 16mm Bolex and other analogue apparatus that were used to make the first films. The digital technical equipment in the back section of the studio provides a sharp visual contrast with the Wunderkammer atmosphere. The Quays began to utilise the practicalities and innovation of digital cameras and computer programmes in commercials. The new technologies were also exploited to create many of the visual

spaces in their first feature film. They describe one of these used in a commercial for Kelloggs Rice Krispie Treats called "Float":

It was the first time we really started post production using plates. We'd have a locked off camera. There was a sliding board that went on to a raft. We shot that separately, then you'd make the next scene, sub-camera there, the little girl doing something in the water, then you'd have five plates and put them together in post production.²⁴

The Quays also did an AIDS public service announcement for the Partnership for a Drug-Free America to be broadcast on MTV America, with music composed by Jankowski.²⁵ It was produced in 1996 by the National Institute on Drug Abuse and the Advertising Council as part of the "Get High, Get Stupid, Get AIDS" national media campaign in the United States. The brightly coloured film has three sections and uses fast hard cuts. 'Get high' shows puppets at a table littered with drugs, paraphernalia and condoms; 'get stupid' suggests an intoxicated state of mind and 'get aids' a bed with two puppets on it. The iron filings from *Stille Nacht 1* also resurface in the film's third segment 'growing' in the corner of a doorway and virally swarming over the two puppets in bed that 'didn't use a condom'. The Quays were given a scenario, but after the film was completed, the MTV board wouldn't agree to show the film because for American standards (and prudery) it was too explicit in its sexuality. Although they had adhered to the scenario provided: "The original storyboard was passed, and they knew there was a condom in it. But 'not on Prime Time TV'! The Finnish do some fantastic [AIDS commercials]. Ours was conservative and it still didn't get on American prime time TV."²⁶ To date, the film has not been aired. To promote the National Hockey League broadcasts for the 'Fox Sport' television channel, the Quays made two commercials: "Library" and "Laundromat". These mark a playful return to an earlier style of mise-en-scène, and 'insecticity' is evident in the characters: the puppets appear to be made of stag beetle parts on armatures, dressed in hockey clothes. However, they had some difficulties with the final result:

We hooked them with the idea on the telephone on an initial conference call. It was like pulling teeth, and we said, almost as a joke, we could do it

²⁴ Quay Brothers interview, 2003.

²⁵ Director's Report to the National Advisory Council on Drugs, September 1995.

²⁶ Quay Brothers interview, 2003.

for insects. It was fun to animate, it looked interesting and the live action was nice but they messed with the editing. We walked out of the editing room. They took it over.²⁷

Despite occasional run-ins like the one above, on the whole the combination of reputation, resourcefulness, a good sense of humour and innovation allowed the Quays to access and experiment with expensive equipment and post-production processing methods. After the interregnum between their the golden years of UK public funding and their last commissioned experimental narrative--The Comb in 1990--like many independent animators, the Quays were not averse to the substantial financial rewards for commercials and exploited the commissions as trying grounds for their development as filmmakers.

The Dance Films

The distinct choreography of objects and spaces is one of the Quays' most striking formal features in the Quay Brothers' puppet animation films --the tailor's assistants in Street of Crocodiles, the impetuous, intertwining lines in Rehearsals, the lithe fork tines and dental floss in Institute Benjamenta. The strong penchant for dance precedes the choreographed live action films by at least a decade. No doubt the Quays' experience on opera and ballet productions influenced their later work with actors and refined their abilities to work with dancers, as is evident from the emphasis on choreography in Institute Benjamenta. . The Quays: "Puppet animation is much closer to dance and music, which are our biggest sources of inspiration."²⁸ When they were working on This Unnameable Little Broom, they went to see a performance by Bausch's Tanztheater Wuppertal ensemble. Griffiths:

I'm pretty sure at about that time was our first encounter with seeing Pina Bausch her first ever visit to England with her company, where the twins and I saw all of it at Sadlers Wells. We were pretty influenced by what she was doing at that time-- the influence she had is still phenomenally present in the work.²⁹

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Comment on VHS cover of the BFI Connoisseur VHS publication.

²⁹ Griffiths Interview 2003.

They are great admirers of Pina Bausch, who "uses the most extraordinary range of music [they] have ever heard".³⁰ The twins' attraction to the emotional and aesthetic qualities of dance and choreography that they had convincingly transmuted into the grace and timing of their puppets' gestures was given opportunity to mature in the form of two live-action dance films. In 1999, Channel Four commissioned a series of dance films called 'Dance for the Camera' that united choreographers with filmmakers. Duet. Variations on the Convalescence of "A" (1999), is a 16 minute film directed by the Quay Brothers, in collaboration with and choreographed by Tuckett. This work is central to the Quays' continuing development as filmmakers and in their work with actors, as it introduced an intimacy and dialogue between set, dancer and music that had not been available in the large opera productions or the dialogue-driven plays. Duet commences in a breezy studio space that is spatially organised by long, semi-transparent fabric hangings, a small cupboarded table and two chairs. The dancers explore their developing relationship and their movements and gestures are a lyrical and occasionally humorous, beautifully and sensitively supported and guided by three musical movements from Arvo Pärt. The first movement of the film ballet is monochrome and commences with music, and long, gossamer embroidered curtains, a chair and table are lingered over by the camera as much as the dancers (Adam Cooper and Zenaida Yanowsky, both of the English Royal Ballet), who enter the set and walk slowly and thoughtfully through the space. They meet and a playful courtship commences, with leaps and skips through the space, the woman licking the man's thumb, or dusting off each other's torsos. In the silence before the next piece of music, the image transforms slowly as it bleeds from black and white into colour. Standing beside the table, a drawer opens and a scarf (animated) slithers out and the woman arranges it around her neck. Then a hat (also animated) comes out of the cupboard, and the man puts it on his head. The number of curtains is now six, and they form a pale white background, filling the frame.

The mood of the third movement is altered and a dusky, side-lit space suggests the emotional and sensual tone of the dancers. As well, the curtains are billowing, moved by an unseen source of wind. Light falls into the stage from two bright and low, lights, and a foggy effect is achieved by artificial fog that makes the light ethereal. Here the dancers take over the whole space, moving between the curtains, from left to right. The chiaroscuro effect is at its starkest here, with the visibility of dancer's bodies sometimes reduced to a glowing outline from the side spots. Their movements range between great leaps and runs across the stage, to slow,

³⁰ Quay Questions 2, Rust Gray, p. 6.

less space-consuming to stillness. In this part, the curtains seem to be part of the choreography, heightening the lyrical and emotional feel of the piece. A range of visual motifs are familiar from the previous films. Most prominent are chiaroscuro lighting and the shift within the film from monochrome to colour. But there are others: Yanowsky's repeated backward bend from her waist with her arms held outstretched at the level of her head is almost identical to the tailor's assistants' animated movements in Street of Crocodiles when the screw is pulled out of the 'Bruno' puppet's box. This is an extreme, painfully beautiful movement, and Yanowsky manages to hold the extreme backward angle with strength and grace to attain the length of time for it to become more meaningful. 1999 was also the year the Quays created set designs for Bärlamms Fest, was staged at for the Wiener Festwochen 1999 in Vienna. An opera composed and directed by Olga Newirth, the libretto was based on Elfriede Jelinek's reworking of a theatre version of the "Baalamb's Holiday" story from Leonora Carrington. László Molnár's review in the *Salzburger Nachrichten* describes the production's mood:

The theme is the unspeakable, the netherworldly, threat, feat and insanity-the stuff of English gothic novels. Behind ever figure one presumes a symbol, behind every action a drive, and since nothing must be concrete, everything can slither into madness.³¹

This description shows affinities with the Quays' own narrative and thematic interests. Although Molnár's review is somewhat scathing in terms of performance, his description of the set recalls visual elements from Street of Crocodiles, Stille Nacht III and the final scene in Institute Benjamenta:

Pale faces: scary! Bright red blood smears: shudder! Snowflakes in a forest of dry papier-mâché fir trees: shiver . . . At the utmost a stopgap for acceptable images from a school play's bag of tricks; this is developed to an embarrassing degree in the central scene when Theodora's nursery opens and with it the core to her soul, with the appearance of round, colourful animal spirits (that were tortured to death by Mrs. Carnis). This is the betrayal to the seriousness with which Olga Neuwirth seeks the vestiges of the mood of the uncanny.³²

³¹ Molnár, László, 1999. Author translation.

³² Ibid.

Molnár's review highlights themes and tropes that figure throughout the Quay Brothers' artistic output: images usurped from childhood innocence and swathed in psychopathological sensuality, bestowed with eerie lighting and populated with familiar objects that evoke a sense of the uncanny. At the end of Institute Benjamenta, Herr Benjamenta and Joseph disappear in a cloud of snowflakes; in Street of Crocodiles, blood-smear machinery, flesh-filled watches and livers and kidneys populate the sets and Stille Nacht III is a dense thicket of fir trees and automata.

A further Channel Four commission, The Sandman (2000) was also choreographed by Will Tuckett, and he is also credited as co-director with the Quay Brothers. This 41-minute piece was a beautiful classical dance film with elements of theatre made by Koninck for the 'Dance on Film' scheme and co-produced by Griffiths. The film was based in the well-known 'Tales of Hoffmann', with musical underlay from György Kurtág and Janáček. The film commences with a long, calm shot of a veiled woman sitting at a table, followed by a short series of animated shots, the only ones in the film. With a change of scene, a man appears and walks through various sets past figures who are all suspended in time—even a sheet is frozen in its upwards billowing effect of being laid on a bed. In the next scene, in Hoffman's bedroom, where he lays dying, then the dancing commences and the remainder of the film is made of dance sequences in loosely connected open sets, repeatedly returning to Hoffman's bedroom. Solos, pas de deux and pas de trois dominate the movements, and support the sub-narratives: a relationship between Hoffman's nurse and doctor (Cooper and Yanowsky from Duet), a man (Nathanael?) obsessed with a woman/automaton (Olimpia?), a non-dancing couple standing on the fringes. (Alice Krige, who played Lisa in the feature) Not a word is spoken throughout the film. Shot in a monochrome-effect colour, the design, cameras and lighting echo the aesthetic and formal features of Duet. Glowingly lit embroidered cloth draped around Hoffman's nurse as she showers closely resembles the billowing curtains, set lighting and soft fog effects also echo the chiaroscuro in Duet. And there is a subtle foreshadowing: a non-functioning Scandinavian pedestal clock in this film will be a dominant part of the set design for In Absentia. The film was premiered at the Rotterdam Film festival and it is lovely example of interplay between dancers and the Quays' sets.

If we contemplate how little the Quays' implement spoken narrative in the films, and how the narratives are, on the whole, music driven, the explorations in the dance films seemed to be a natural progression for their interests in aesthetic,

emotional, and sensual expression through gesture, set design and narrative spaces. Having worked with actors on the feature and the ballet, opera and theatre productions, that also provided valuable experience for the first feature, they became more familiar with live action's orthogonal requirements of scale and proportion that were necessary for dancers moving through spaces that were to be filmed. Although they seem to be a digression from the animation films, the stage designs and visual and the dance films represent the Quays' ability to move between genres and media.

Shattered Sound and Light: The 'World' of In Absentia

The choreographic work with cameras, puppets and actors of the past years culminated in a shift to a completely new form of poetic aesthetics in the film that came out in the same year: choreographed light. In the Barbican Theatre in London in 2000, a screening of a BBC-commissioned series called "Sound on Film International" took place in front of a full house. The series' concept was to select filmmakers and match them with contemporary music pieces that should be the inspiration for a short film. The audience experienced collaborations from Hal Hartley and Louis Andriessen, Werner Herzog and Sir John Tavener, Nicholas Roeg and Adrian Utley of Portishead and the Quay Brothers, who were paired with a musical score by Karlheinz Stockhausen: "Zwei Paare". The musical pieces were in part performed on stage. *In Absentia* was screened in Cinemascope format, and the Quays fully exploited the format to present the stunning interplay of Stockhausen's music and the eerie and hermetic gestures of a solitary woman furiously writing on screen. *In Absentia* is perhaps the closest the Quays had yet come to combining their array of artistic talents in one film: choreographing or orchestrating music, gesture of puppets and actors, lighting and image.

As with previous films, significant research into the inspirational fragments lies behind the finished work. At the Hayward Gallery in 1996, an exhibition entitled "Beyond Reason. Art and Psychosis. Works from the Prinzhorn Collection" presented a fascinating range of sculptures, texts, drawings, embroideries and paintings by men and women who suffered from various forms of dementia praecox (schizophrenia in contemporary medical terminology), and from other forms of mental disturbances. In a corner of the exhibition, two sheets of paper were crowded with claustrophobic and dense lines of writing--each line the same. These were the tortured love letters written by Emma Hauck, inmate in a psychiatric hospital. Kahn describes varieties of noise that are found on the written page, what he calls "a silent

figure of significant noise [that] exists in handwriting [...] the legibility of an apparent illegibility"³³ Besides their material existence as ink on pages, Hauck's scrawls and graphic writing style and repetition are full of desperate passion, madness and a bizarre sensuality. In Stockhausen's composition, the Quays quite literally found a sound-based aesthetic conspirator to Hauck's method of her madness.

The Quays have a long-standing interest in Art Brut, what Roger Cardinal has called 'the art of the repressed' in his seminal Outsider Art (1989), another term for works made by psychiatric patients. In contemporary usage, the latter term has been expanded to include artworks by people with mental disabilities and low levels of education. The Quays' main area of interest, however, concentrates on the works of artists that were patients in psychiatric clinics in the first half of the 20th Century. Adolf Wölfli was a Swiss peasant whose elaborate and cryptic word pictures have been the subject of much study. Although the Quays have only made two films with an acknowledged reference to Art Brut, elements and inspiration of this artistic production seep into a number of their layer works. In Absentia was inspired by the frenzied microgrammes of Hauck and the illogical, tortured impetus behind many of these works is rampant in their imagery.

Art Brut is an aesthetic practice that evolved out of therapeutic programmes developed by medical doctors and psychiatrists who themselves had a developed sense of aesthetics. In spite of fascinating publications such as Genio e Follia from Cesare Lombroso (1864), Walter Morgenthaller's 1921 book about Adolf Wölfli Ein Gesisteskranker als Künstler, or Hans Prinzhorn's now standard work Artistry of the Mentally Ill (written in 1922), the thesis that fine arts and creations of schizophrenic patients were incompatible concepts was long upheld. In the meantime this attitude has changed significantly and has been replaced by fine arts informed new evaluation of these artistic works. The term Art Brut was coined by Jean Dubuffet, who, in the 1940s, developed a keen interest in artistic works by mentally ill patients. Rhodes: "Dubuffet's concept of Art Brut grew out of Surrealism's interest in phenomena that lie outside of individual prejudice and expectations and in the commonplace of experience that is too often overlooked."³⁴ This connection to surrealist practice in image production, whether film or otherwise, is key to understanding the Quays' stylistic development, both because their interest in

³³ Kahn, 1999, p. 26.

³⁴ Rhodes, 2000, p. 22.

Surrealism is well-documented and as their films often present phenomena that transcend expectations and develop new ways of seeing inner 'worlds'.

In an essay on Svankmajer, whose animation films exhibit a strong relationship to the unconscious processes and question the reliability of reality, Roger Cardinal, one of the fields defining scholars, suggests "[t]he whole ideal of animated film is to suppress the categories of normal perception; indeed its logic might even be to suppress all differential categories, and annihilate the very conditions of rationality."³⁵ Cardinal appears in the credits in Street of Crocodiles and wrote the script for their commissioned film on anamorphosis. So how do concepts of Art Brut apply to the Quays' film practice? For a start, the Quays have long been fascinated by this kind of artistic production, and it seems a natural development if we consider their strong interest in Surrealism, a movement that was deeply inspired by the works of schizophrenic patients. A long-time friendship with Cardinal no doubt fired their interest, and their many excursions to art galleries and exhibitions of these works and collections indicates their interest.

In 1995, I accompanied the Quays and Richard Weihe on an excursion to Herisau, in the Swiss Canton of Appenzell where the Herisau sanatorium is located. Walser was committed to the sanatorium in 1933 where he stopped writing and died in 1956. He had previously been in the Waldau sanatorium (Canton Berne) where Adolf Wölfli was held for the last 35 years of his life. Wölfli was one of the best known Art Brut artists whom the Quays acknowledge as an influence. I asked if they considered Walser's own psychiatric problems when they worked on the feature script:

Yes, it is us sort of making a reading, particularly of Jakob's character. But then it must be the same trying to imagine the first premonition someone might have had of him drifting to so-called clinical schizophrenia. If he wrote something, did he re-read it and say 'I must be mad?' Because it's mellifluous, he writes beautifully about that sort of thing. I know of the lovely little story which he based 'The Comb' on originally, and he arrives at this little fairy tale house, and looks up and sees himself looking down, I think, or a couple in a room, and one resembles him, and then he goes into the place but nobody is there. He makes this comment about what freedom really is..³⁶

³⁵ Hames, 1995, p. 89.

³⁶ Quay Brothers interview, 1996.

There are formal elements in this form of artistic expression that link it to Quay works. Already in This Unnameable Little Broom, the Quays were inspired by Art Brut.

We wanted to make a very stylised universe--Keith [Griffiths] wanted us to make a fantastic desert and things like that and quite realistic, anatomic men with real anatomies. Enkidou would have been a man skinned. We did some original drawings, but for the live-action sequences, because it was meant a bigger film. It was after the little Svankmajer film, but we wanted to make something very grotesque. The drawing for Gilgamesh was based on one of the mad artists in Switzerland [Adolf Wölfli], and it was just one of those impulses. There were two universes, the world of the city, the metropolis, the town, four walls, the colour of sand, playpen with hoops, a bit of machinery, like a trap, passport control, in and out.³⁷

Many of their puppet films also display images of sexual pathology reminiscent of those described by Berlin sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld in the early part of the twentieth century.³⁸ The gently stroked kidney or the screws penetrating the pocket watch faces in Street of Crocodiles, the wiggling fingers of the woman and the puppet in The Comb, the thimbles sewn on to the back of Lisa Benjamenta's sleeping attire or her tight corset--many of these originate in the Quays' declared inspiration of the works of Wölfli, Emma Hauck and other Art Brut artists in combination with Surrealist imagery which was also inspired by Art Brut.

In the final chapter of his book that was first published in 1922, Prinzhorn muses on the meaning of schizophrenic art in the context of his own times:

The particularly close relationship of a large number of our pictures to contemporary art is obvious. Furthermore, experience shows that people of very different characters, ages, and occupations were powerfully and lastingly impressed by these pictures and were not infrequently compelled to ask themselves fundamental cultural and philosophical questions.³⁹

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ See Hirschfeld, 1948.

³⁹ Prinzhorn, 1972, p. 270.

The unusually intense attraction that Art Brut continues to have for a wide range of people, and in light of contemporary engagement with this genre of art, his assertion that the images force us to reconsider certain cultural and attitudinal concepts continues to be fulfilled. The imagery in the Quays' films that draws on inspirations from Art Brut has also opened up the 'worlds' of the deranged and help place them more strongly in an art-historical, aesthetic context.

Script development for In Absentia was initiated in a similar way as many of the Quays' films: music has always been "the primary, if not major, instigator of the scenarios. And like always in all the films it is also the dramaturgical blood."⁴⁰ A difference to previous films was that instead of choosing the music themselves, the Quays were given a piece of music before production began. The visual track grew out of the Quays' encounter with Emma Hauck's letters from the Prinzhorn Collection at the Hayward exhibition, and so they developed another, written scenario.

The day we listened to the piece for the first time there was a release within us of a torrent of ideas and visual flashes. We then started immediately with the direction of the film without having a real and proper work plan, but developing it as we went along.⁴¹

The Quays recount that Stockhausen wept when he saw the film at an avant-premiere. "He just came to us afterwards and said: 'How did you know?' And we replied: 'Know what?' And he said 'My mother...' It's as if we had tapped into his psyche."⁴² Only later they learned that his mother had been imprisoned by the Nazis in an asylum, and she died there. The composer's approach to composition and instrumentation chimes quite astonishingly with the Quays' experimentation in juxtaposing image and sounds. He uses electronic and traditional instruments, and does not shy from integrating recording machines that alter sound into his work. In his creative practice, Stockhausen also seems to share with the twins an interest in the 'liberation of the mistake', in that he develops new approaches to uniting disparate elements of music.

In some such works, such as *Klavierstück XI* (1956; Piano Piece XI), Stockhausen gives performers a choice of several possible sequences in which to play a given collection of individual moments, since they are

⁴⁰ Quay Brothers correspondence with Chris Robinson, 2001.

⁴¹ Aita, 2001.

⁴² Habib, 2001.

equally interesting regardless of their order of occurrence. Chance decisions thus play an important role in many of the compositions. [...] In Stockhausen's electronic music these juxtapositions are taken still further. In the early work *Gesang der Jünglinge* (1956; *Song of the Youths*), a recording of a boy's voice is mixed with highly sophisticated electronic sounds. *Kontakte* (1960) is an encounter between electronic sounds and instrumental music, with an emphasis on their similarities of timbre.⁴³

Stockhausen's methodology of chance and improvisation has affinities with the Quays musical methodology discussed in Chapter 9. His radical openness to alterations in performance can also be likened to the Quays' 'liberation of the mistake', allowing unexpected outcomes and combinations to take a place in finished films. The complexity of Stockhausen' music and soundscapes is counterpointed and harmonised by images that elicit an emotional state of the main figure, a woman in an asylum. Most striking is the way the shattering, knife-like brilliance of the animated light, functions in harmony as visual analogy to the clashing, high-pitched agonies of Stockhausen's composition.

The film commences with a fog-shrouded fantastic, distorted landscape. Liquid patches of brightness shift across horizontal planes, sliding over, almost caressing the objects and architectural fragments that litter the landscape. As the light shifts further into the distance, it starts to move upwards, revealing a vertical background plane that changes the initial impression of a horizon. After 90 seconds a new space is revealed after a hard cut--a thick, smeary atmospheric emptiness with an elliptical sun struggling to send its rays through the dark atmosphere. The camera pans down to reveal a house between two trees. The light gradually rises, and we see more of the house, climaxing with a bright white flash on the right. The main part of the film takes place in a 1:1 scale room in what seems to be an institution. Scenes of a woman, E.H. at a desk writing, are intercut with animated sequences. The ones in black and white show windows, rooms, a wall with a platform from which a pair of legs rhythmically swing, pencil lead tips rolling across surfaces. There are also a set of colour animated sequences: the first one we see is at 5:02--a bluish-tinged realm with sharp contours features a strange insect-like creature on hoofs that is at a table in a gesture reminiscent of the actor's pose. In the ensuing scenes, some extremely rapidly cut, pencil leads move around, E.H.'s (actually Timothy's) lead-smeared

⁴³ The Ensemble Sospeso New York.

finger tips are shot in extreme close up with macro lenses. These different spaces and objects are constantly invaded and revealed by spots, beams and swathes of light.

At 11:46 we see E.H from behind, sitting. A head enters from the right and moves out of frame, and then a hand reaches into the frame and strokes her neck. She collapses in her chair and the following sequences are cut with an increased urgency. At 16:41, we see for the first time what she is writing--an entire sheet of cramped, dense lines of unintelligible pencil writing in long hand. At 17:30, the landscape from the start of the film appears for the first time in colour. The next sequence shows someone at a Victorian writing desk, pulling a drawer open that is full of pencils. The hand takes two of them out. Then, E.H from behind--she turns her head, as if listening. At 18:20, we see a close up of a gap beneath a door., then a shot of E.H. turning her head. We then see someone's lower legs in the corridor heading towards the door. A body bends down and, in three ensuing shots intercut with black frames, the hand rolls two pencils under the door's gap. The film ends with white titles on a black background: To E.H. who lived and wrote to her husband from an asylum "Herzensschatzli komm" (sweetheart come).

Besides the light--one of the film's main protagonists--and E.H., there is another animated figure--a grotesque, horned half humanoid, half insect apparition that inhabits the coloured realm. The two realms are connected by the lead tips that break off of E.H.'s pencils--we see them scattered on the floor in black and white, and again in the colour sequences, where they are animated. I interpret this as the puppet representing E.H.'s inner 'world'--the puppet embodies her madness, the pencil tips traverse the two experienced 'realities' of her mind and her physical, everyday world in black and white.

In Absentia was shot in anamorphic widescreen--a first for the Quays. With a decent budget they were able to create a visual experience of their puppets and the special qualities of macro lenses that could show far more detail if used with 16mm or 35mm film projection. The aesthetic of the analogue worlds of black and white and colour, live-action and animation is a recurring stylistic element in the Quays' films. It was used in the Janacek film, in The Comb and in Street of Crocodiles, where the exposition begins with a black and white live-action realm with a spit-guided transition to the animated colour one through 'The Wooden Esophagus'. In Absentia is stylistically closer to The Comb, in that the realms and figures are distinctly separate: the woman's world is black and white, the puppet's is dazzling colour. This is a new kind of colour from the Quays' palette--instead of the muted browns, ochres and reds of the previous films, sharply distinct and vivid blues, reds and brightness.

This is the same palette they used for some of the commercials they were making at the time--it is possible that the compactness and intensity of 30-second spots demanded more dynamic colour, and that this experimentation found its way back into the film.

The next ballet collaboration was premiered at the Place des Arts Theatre Maisonneuve in Montreal in 2001. The Queen of Spades (La Dame de Pique) was choreographed by Brandstrup for Les Grandes Ballets Canadiens. The ballet was inspired by Alexander Pushkin's "The Queen of Spades" and the musical score composed Gabriel Thibaudreau, based on Peter Tchaikovsky's eponymous opera. The Quays created a number of short cinematic visual decors that were video projected on to a semi-opaque screen placed in front of the stage, fully covering the proscenium for the period of projection. They were dissatisfied with the pale and flat projection that did not achieve the effect they intended:

I wish we had been able to be in Montreal during the projection, to adjust the technical side. We arrived on the night before the premiere and things couldn't be sorted out. [...] Unfortunately, nothing turned out the way it should have. I think there was a lot of politics involved. But it wouldn't stop us from trying again.⁴⁴

The set design and visuals were, however, well received. Steve Howell reviewed the production for the Press Republican Online: "The innovative multimedia mix of film animation, video imagery and special effects by The Brothers Quay, Sylvain Robert and Jimmy Lakatos magically create images of rushing waters to Russian propaganda posters right before our eyes."⁴⁵ In the following year, the Quays did the designs for William Tuckett's 2002 production Wind in the Willows, when Tuckett was a dancer and choreographer at the Royal Ballet. The performance was based on an adaptation of Kenneth Graham's book, the score was by Martin Ward, after George Butterworth, and rhyming narration scripted by Poet Laureate Andrew Motion. The Quays were responsible for set design and costumes were designed by Nicky Gillibrand, who worked with the Quays on Institute Benjamenta and is a long-time collaborator with Jones. The production ran at Linbury Studio Theatre, Royal Opera House, London. For children and families, Wind in the Willows featured dancers as animals, and incorporated dancing, singing and talking, so the dancers

⁴⁴ Habib, 2002.

⁴⁵ Howell, 2001.

had acting roles as well as the choreography to deal with. Adam Cooper, who played Badger, was a principal dancer in Duet.

The Phantom Museum and Recent Short Films

In 2003, the Quays completed a film that benefited from the success of the documentary-like Anamorphosis that had attracted the attention of art historians and museums. This was no doubt due to Quays' ability to meld factual art historical documentary with impressionistic and narrative animated shots and scenes. The Phantom Museum: Random Forays into Sir Henry Wellcome's Medical Collection (2002) was commissioned by the Wellcome Institute for their exhibition 'Medicine Man: The Forgotten Museum of Henry Wellcome' in the British Museum June-November 2003.⁴⁶ The Quays were given access to the wealth of the collection, and in the film a white begloved 'archivist' playfully negotiates a spiral stairwell and explores the boxed, racked archival treasures.

Wellcome was an American born in 1853 lived the 'American dream', working his way from poverty to amassing a great fortune from medical supplies. He used some of his money to support scientific and archaeological research, and was a great collector of medical curios, books, artworks, religious paraphernalia, and it seems he had a special interest in erotic toys. Automata figure in his collection, as do prostheses that bear a strong similarity to the armatures used in puppet animation. His curiosity was spurred by the workings of disease and its prevention through human hygiene until his death in 1936. Sir Henry Wellcome was a true collector, and during his lifetime (he died in 1936) he accumulated one of the world's largest medical collections. To help gain a sense of the curious diversity of the exhibition, in an exhibition preview, Emma Crichton-Miller singles out six of 600 artefacts on display:

a lock of George III's hair, Van Gogh's sole etching, a selection from the vast Hildburgh collection of amulets, a shrunken head from Ecuador, a set of prosthetic devices made for a double amputee and a sixteenth-century French manuscript describing marvels and monsters . . . The sheer extent and diversity of Wellcome's forgotten collection speaks of a more

⁴⁶ The exhibition was curated by Ken Arnold and Danielle Olsen and designed by Caruso St John.

interdisciplinary, even chaotic, intellectual world than has held sway since Wellcome's death.⁴⁷

The Phantom Museum was shot on 8mm and 35mm film stock and animated in the museum and in the Quays' studio. There is the familiar Quay interplay of black and white and colour imagery, and most of the film is shot in live action, interspersed with animated sequences that 'document' the life of the objects. It features a selection of Wellcomes' collection, with an especial focus on artefacts of a sexual nature. A wood homunculus/foetus is painstakingly unpacked from the layers of a woman's body, carved in minute detail, including removable labia that reveal the physical structure of the womb.

The decision to commission the Quays was no doubt in part due to their profound expertise of assembling and animating puppets and objects that are detailed and minute, since the collection is replete with such artefacts. The Quays' fascination with automata no doubt was a deciding factor in taking on the commission. Through skill in 'bringing to life' a carefully made selection of museum pieces, some of the Wellcome Collection's artefacts acquire metaphysical qualities similar to the metaphysical machines in the Quays' other films and this adds a charm to the otherwise straightforward presentation of the objects. The film has an exploratory, almost didactic feel and structure, documenting the interiors both of the Collection and of the objects as their layers and wrappings are incrementally removed. A recurring motif is an armature-like animated metal hand--its elongated fingers make a slightly sinister, clackety movement that seems to suggest its desire to explore the boxes too. Gary Tarn's score does not add the auditive complicity that most of the Quays' other films have--it is rather thin and bloodless, but appropriate for the film's straightforward subject matter. The film was directed by Griffiths and there is a credit of 'Librarian' for Stephen Quay'. It was produced by animate! a production company run by Dick Arnall at the time that specialises in animation and experimental filmmaking that is funded by Channel Four and the Arts Council of England.

The Quays were commissioned for visuals for the multimedia performance "Death and Resurrection" at Tate Modern. Poor Roger, Oranges and Lemons, Green Gravel and Jenny Jones (all 2003), form a series of four short films to accompany a musical performance sponsored by the series Tate and Egg Live for Easter. The event was composed of two parts in two starkly differing venues: St. Paul's cathedral and

⁴⁷ Chrichton-Miller, 2003.

Tate Modern's Turbine Hall. The website advertising suggests: "[t]he evening contrasts a sublime and unquestioning expression of Christian belief with an exploration of the inner world and feelings of children, in two iconic London settings that most powerfully represent the religious and the secular."⁴⁸ Cantatas from Johann Sebastian Bach were conducted by John Eliot Gardiner and featured the Monteverdi Choir and the English Baroque Soloists at St Paul's. On conclusion of this part, the audience walked over the Millennium Bridge to Tate Modern to the second part of the performance: Steve Martland's *Street Songs*, "a song collection that uses traditional childrens' rhymes, which are about children's enactments of adult rituals surrounding the ideas of death and resurrection,"⁴⁹ The Quays shorts were titled after four selected songs performed by the Monteverdi Choir. Martland regarded the film for the last song, *Jenny Jones*, as the most moving for him. The Quays used one of the anatomical artefacts from The Phantom Museum. Martland:

The Quays use this doll to create a visionary anatomy that reinforces the humanity that is the message of *Street Songs*. The model is so exact and detailed that the sex organs are displayed and from the womb comes a tiny baby. This tiny model carved from ivory symbolises the rebirth, or resurrection, that follows death (in this case that of the child *Jenny Jones*) or archetypally, all that is human. In this song, as with the others, the Quays so beautifully elucidated the themes that despite our limited time together on the project I am very happy to call them my collaborators.⁵⁰

Recycling of objects and images is an approach the Quays have used with success in the past, and this film was no exception. By placing the anatomical puppet in a narrative setting, they managed to elicit, or at least to suggest, a possible world of the puppet in the sets and designs.

The Quays' collaboration with ballet, dance and theatre continues. The next project was a commission from the Hans Christian Andersen Foundation for, The Anatomy of a Storyteller, a full-length dance piece about Hans Christen Andersen that will be one of many events in Denmark celebrating of the 200th Anniversary of his birth. The cinematically inspired stage set projections were designed by the Quays, according to the official Hans Christian Andersen website "a visual landscape of artificial, animated models constantly undergoing transformation both textually

⁴⁸ http://www.tateandegglive.com/event3_d%26r.html

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Martland, 2003.

and rhythmically."⁵¹ The performance premiered in Devon in March 2005 before international touring. Brandstrup continues to direct ballets and dance projects and commission the Quays to do set design, most recently the 2007 opera She So Beloved, at Opera North, Leeds, inspired by a poem by Rainer Maria Rilke, that included trademark anamorphic paintings, portholes and an eight-minute film projection Eurydice – She So Beloved (2007). Working with large-scale projects naturally led to the Quays' interest in the challenge of feature length films, and the two they have made to date are remarkable transpositions of the vitalist themes of the puppet animation films into work with actors.

⁵¹ Hans Christian Anderson 2005 website.

Chapter 10. Animistic Architectures

The Stille Nacht shorts and The Comb had been a trying ground for a bigger project and the shift from animation to live-action was a quiet evolution to a larger scale. The Quays also wanted to preserve a belief in their previous experience with animation, and that there should be no reason why the animation technique should suddenly become irrelevant. They were spurred on by the simple knowledge that not 'everything' can be animated or achieved by animation alone.¹ In 1995, the Quays completed their first full-length live action film, Institute Benjamenta. The process of getting the film funded was a long one, and via Griffiths the Quays fought against being hired as directors for their own script, negotiating between producers wanting to imprint their own narrative ideas on the film and the twins' intent to realise their vision. As the shooting progressed, these relationships improved. The producers saw that the film was developing in a way they could understand (and market). Griffiths kept a low profile on the set, more supportive and interested than invasive, knowing that a dominating presence would have made the director uncomfortable and that this would affect the work with the crew and actors, a new experience for the Quays.

A significant part of the shift from animation and stage design to feature films was the necessity of finding a way to sustain imagery and concepts from the animated films in a feature length film, and this meant developing a script with stronger and sustaining narrative coherence. The script was written together through a number of revisions with author and scriptwriter Alain Passes, who has also published two novels and several short stories (Passes has worked for the stage, radio and film, scripted television documentaries and also worked in film production in France and England). It was the first film with dialogues the Quays had done since the artists' documentaries for Channel Four (excluding the commercials) and this posed some challenges:

We had to use dialogue but we still wanted to maintain the power of the images. We took on only so much that would never sabotage all the imagery and vice versa. The very notion of taking on a feature film means you've got to take on the dialogue, it's like adding another layer.²

¹ Quay Brothers correspondence with Chris Robinson, 2001.

² Quay Brothers interview, 1996.

The Quays found a balance between these layers and directly spoken, diegetic dialogue does not dominate. Referring to Bausch and the Kirov ballet, the Quays speak of dance "as a possibility to eliminate dialogue--and why can't a feature film, if carefully done, do the same?"³ The film includes a number of short animated sequences and incorporates many of the stylistic, spatial, rhythmic and technical features of their animated works. These were transposed into live-action set design, shooting and direction that marked a radical development for the Quays towards immersion in their interest in dance and working with actors. The mastery of miniature scale achieved in their animation films made a smooth transition to the life-size decors, live-action technical parameters and work with actors. As with their short films, Institute Benjamenta draws its inspiration from fragments and whispers of literary material. The film places a hermetic and baroque cloak over Walser's novel Institute Benjamenta and other texts by Walser: "we wanted the text, the monologues, the inner-voice-overs to sort of float and be suspended in order to evoke the fairy-tale-ish and that Walserian realm of half-waking, half-sleeping world-in-between."⁴ The film knots a tapestry of myth, choreography and symbolic and literary reference, located in what Atkinson describes as "a fever dream vision of Mitteleuropa" that aptly describes the Quays' realisation of this world.⁵

Institute Benjamenta

Lezsek Jankowski's music and a spoken, lilting riddle from a Bavarian folk tale that originated in a musical piece from Karl Orff are the aural foreshadowing which accompany Institute Benjamenta's exquisitely stylised opening credits graphics and fleeting animation sequences. At dusk, a small man approaches a door, pulls at his heavily starched, blindingly white collar, and hesitatingly knocks. Jakob von Gunten (Mark Rylance), a thirty-ish, delicate man who has escaped his upper class origins and "wants to be of use to someone in this life" enters Institute Benjamenta, an old perfume factory transformed into a school for domestics. He embarks on a dreamlike voyage through an eerie, animistic fairy tale world, embodied by Institute itself. Assisted by her devoted and enigmatic model student Kraus (Daniel Smith), doe-eyed Victorian-clad Fräulein Lisa Benjamenta (Alice Kriege) runs the Institute with her melancholic, phlegmatic older brother Herr Benjamenta (Gottfried John), guiding her students through a lesson which is always

³ Ibid.

⁴ Quay Brothers correspondence with Chris Robinson, 2001.

⁵ Atkinson, 1994, p. 38.

the same--'Practice-scenes-from-life'--mechanical repetition, self-castigation, monotony and submission. It is a curriculum of cryptic signs, absurd gestures and unbearable detail. Jakob's arrival awakes in Herr Benjamenta a haunting hope of a Saviour, a hope that is rendered more complex by the film's discrete homoerotic undertones. The fragmented, disturbing and obscure relationships between brother and sister and Kraus are disrupted by Jakob's arrival. His behaviour sets him apart from the other students: fleeting moments of stifled confession and unarticulated emotion initiate a series of sensual epiphanies in Lisa. Jakob has awaked Walser's 'Sleeping Beauty' and stirred Lisa from a loveless existence from which she realises there is no escape. The hermetic and perhaps incestuous relationship between brother and sister is interrupted by Jakob's physical presence and his effect on both Lisa and her brother.

A terrifying sublime simultaneously haunts and mystifies Institute and its inhabitants. Unable to respond to her desire, bound up in the suffocating atmosphere of Institute's labyrinth, Lisa succumbs to an increasingly horrific recognition of something unspeakable which gnaws at her until she can no longer bear it: a longing born of awakened, unfulfilled desire. "Doing without love, yes, that is loving", her unfulfilled longing for the sensual world⁶. Clad in a pale, silken Victorian camisole, we see Lisa reclined on a curlicue-worked iron chair, as if poured into it. In closeup, on her sculptural face, delicate beads of perspiration gather, with faint light reflections on them. In the background, rivulets of water begin to trickle down the walls, gathering momentum and turning into streams. Delirious, but quiet, she slumps down in the chair, sighing faintly, and her delicate foot slides along the floor, elongating her leg in a sensual gesture. The camera cuts to Kraus in another room, emptying the contents of a bucket of water onto where a floor meets a wall. Back in Lisa Benjamenta's retreat, the water streams down the walls, connecting her sanctuary with the strange workings of service and cunning Kraus. Lisa's inner decline climaxes in her decision to stop living; she is, in her own words in the film, "dying from those who could have seen and held me--dying from the emptiness of cautious and clever people". After a confession to Jakob, sealed with a fleeting brush of her lips on his, Lisa expires. On her bier, Snow White mourned by her dwarves, her brother bends in grief over her pale body, Lisa's eyes open once and, unseen by all, sparkle darkly into the camera, a gaze directed at Jakob's point-of-view. She is borne through Institute's inner chambers to a mystical hole in the wall, deposited there by her students. Herr Benjamenta leaves Institute behind and, with Jakob,

⁶ Walser, 1995, p. 87.

walks off, surrounded by floating flakes in a snowball-glass winter world. Kraus remains behind, guardian of the fish bowl, the riddle, and the sleeping beauty, he is the constancy who seems to guarantee that rituals and fossils like *Institute* will never fully expire.

During *Institute Benjamenta*, cinephiles are rewarded with scenes of elusive cinematic and literary reference that identify the Quays' films. In its lighting design, one is obliquely reminded of silent filmmakers Dimitri Kirsanov and F. W. Murnau, and the Russian film poet Tarkovsky in its use of silences, of Kafka, and of essential myth and fairy tale. Continuing collaboration with Jankowski supports and counterpoints the careful visual choreography of the objects and actors. Stunning light design endows this film its ethereal quality. Short, almost fleeting animated sequences punctuate the film and complete the fairy tale environment, suspending time--they are minute and discrete visual hiatuses, reminders of a metaphysical life that slumbers in *Institute*. Like *Lisa Benjamenta*, the images are simultaneously fragile and immortal. The film's epiphanic moments and dreamscapes provide a momentary orientation but are themselves even greater enigmas within the film's poetic fabric.

In isolation, the film's visual leitmotifs and iconography are exquisite: totemistic cloven hoofs, deer antlers, flowing waters, tightly-laced, boned corsets; in their sublimation and appropriation in a world of suppressed Victorian eroticism, they become obsessive, dark and ambiguous. Lisa's cane, with which she guides and masters her students, is tipped with a tiny hoof (initially the Quays thought of giving her cloven shoes); in a close-up at the beginning of the film, when Jakob is brought to Herr Benjamenta, we see a hoof-tipped foot surreptitiously drawn back out of sight. Herr Benjamenta's office is set up like a hunting den--antlers spring from the wall, old clocks tick, wood textures everywhere, and the lighting is like evening sun spilling through trees. These decors have a distinct purpose in the film's narrative: "But all the time it's the surrounding decor that's telling you other things, and Herr Benjamenta sizing [Jakob] up like a young deer, like an animal, measuring how many points he has on his head . . . very animalistic behaviour."⁷ And later we glimpse Herr Benjamenta, out of focus, acting out rutting movements in front of a steam-streaked mirror, a majestic set of antlers in his arms. The film's decors are replete with Bavarian and alpine imagery from the era of Walser's writing: pinecones and pine needles littering floors seem to suggest that the forest is inside *Institute*, anamorphic paintings of copulating deer, Jakob's small 'Schnapps' liquor bottle,

⁷ Quay Brothers interview, 1996.

painted wooden panels and armoires, the stiff costumes, hunting equipment--these are the trophies of the Quays' wanderings in Walser's Swiss 'Heimat' and their Bavarian forays--the objects' history and secret life seep into the film's stylisation. The Quays describe some of the motivational ideas for the decors that were inspired by Walser's description of the Institute as a former perfume factory: "We also imagined that the man who had run this factory had had a Wunderkammer room where he collected somewhat pathological deer imagery. This is the museum that Jakob discovers."⁸ And the snowflakes at the end of the film: Walser died on Christmas day during one of his walks in the forest; the forensic photograph taken on his discovery shows him face-up on the snow with one arm flung out, his eyes half- open in a frigid, unquiet slumber, himself transformed into a morbid Sleeping Beauty.

When asked why they chose to do a film with live actors, they replied "It just seemed time to try a new form--just as a composer might think 'now it's time to do a symphony'".⁹ The Quays explanation of why they 'cast' the Institute before the actors also shows why and how they chose to work with what they call a lateral hierarchy of cinematic formal aspects, not led by dialogue or narrative. The description resonates to a great degree with their concepts for Street of Crocodiles:

In order to score something of, as Walser called it, the "senseless but all the same meaningful 'fairy tale'", we started by casting the decor as the main actor. We felt that the essential 'mysterium' of the film should be Institute itself, as though it had its own inner life and former existences which seemed to dream upon its inhabitants, and exert its own conspiratorial spell and undertows. That time and space should be ambiguous, that the locale of the film would be less geographical than spiritual, all to score that particularly Walserian half-waking, half-sleeping world in between. And, since we've always maintained a belief in the illogical, the irrational, and the obliqueness of poetry, we don't think exclusively in terms of narrative, but also the parentheses that lay hidden behind the narrative.¹⁰

This is the intersection with the Quays' approach to visualisation of Walser's literary music; microscopic views and poetic fragments of what Walser immortalised in his writing: the unimportant, self-denial, maps of frustrated desire and longing. Choreography was the overarching poetic gesture in the film's conceptualisation,

⁸ Nichols Goodeve, 1996, 85.

⁹ Quay Brothers interview, 1996.

¹⁰ Ibid.

comparable to the monistic principles of the Quays' lateral hierarchy that I compared to Eisenstein's 'monistic ensemble'--"Transferring the basic affective aim from one material to another, from one category of 'provocation' to another".¹¹ A gesture to their loyalty to puppet film aesthetics, the Quays remark that they "treated the actors with as much respect as we treated our puppets."¹² This echoes Ficowski's description of the servant Adela in his foreword to The Street of Crocodiles, that she "believes that tailors' dummies should be treated with as much respect as human beings".¹³ With the help of Kim Brandstrup, they choreographed the students and the forks with equal intensity. The six-week production schedule was itself a choreography of objects, actors and technologies. Working with a crew of 44, a significant increase from of a team of two with few collaborators, the Quays' experience in theatre, opera and ballet proved crucial. As a week-long observer at the Hampton Court shoot, it was obvious that the Quays had handpicked the technical team and actors and were working with long-time collaborators from film, theatre and dance. "The production was blessed with a real generosity of spirit . . . It was a genuine collaboration with the actors and the technical crew who trusted us with our vision, in particular our cinematographer Nic Knowland."¹⁴

The animated sequences that punctuate the film were taken from the Stille Nacht III short. They cause hiatuses in the live-action narrative and introduce haptic interludes in the film, linking live action world and Institute's animistic undercurrent. The Quays declare: "We are attracted to that realm between live-action and animation where one can use one domain to amplify another and vice-versa".¹⁵ They represent the secret life of things, and on a larger scale, the Institute itself: these brief, hermetic, dark scenes reveal its textures and histories. An example is in the animated sequence with a glass cloche decorated with antlers and a sign "please sniff", and small fragments of white powder scurry about. The powder was meant to be desiccated stag semen, and the visuals suggest a musty odour is lurking behind the glass, the promise of new life, waiting to be freed. Laura Marks reads the film's olfactory qualities: the film "takes smell, and the knowledge afforded by smell, as a theme, and it employs the Quays' trademark uses of miniature photography and haptic imagery to convey the sense of smell to viewers."¹⁶ The object is another of the Quays' metaphysical machines--this time, however, it is a stag's machine, a motif that

¹¹ Eisenstein, 1949, p. 21.

¹² Quay Brothers interview, 1996.

¹³ Ficowski, in Schulz, 1977, p. 10-11.

¹⁴ Quay Brothers correspondence with Chris Robinson, 2001.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Marks, 2002, p. 127.

endows a homoerotic taint when we see Herr Benjamenta rutting in the shower, and an incestuous one to Lisa's thin, fragile hoof-tipped cane.

Besides the animated sequences, a set of special effects in Institute Benjamenta were composited in post-production at The Mill, an optical effects company in England. The Quays created seven opticals for the film, working over the images cameraman Nic Knowland had already softened with a change to the processing bath temperature. Getting The Mill to match the camera original was the challenge as the monochrome 5321 film stock used required special treatment and many tests. The seven shots varied in length from 170 frames to one of 2'500. The 35mm film stock was transferred to Beta, then digitally reworked; each frame was individually rendered, and then the mattes adjusted. The scene in Lisa's inner chamber, a baroque concave waterless 'pool', is a composite of a set built in the Hampstead Court mansion (the walkways around the central hollow) and a small-scale set of the pool, with gossamer banners haphazardly drifting over its basin. (This image is included in the book cover the Quays designed for a 1995 republication of Walser's Institute Benjamenta) The lighting effects in this shot were animated: one of the 'epiphanies of light' described in Chapter 7 was used in a composite of a shot of Kraus walking on the edge of the pool (not the usual matte blue, since the film was monochrome) and of a smaller set. This shot and the one of the students carrying Lisa on her bier at the end of the film were composites of live action and a model shot. The Quays gave The Mill the model shot to use as a frame for the live-action set and the main challenge for post-production was matching the lighting effects of both shots. On the large set decorated with silver birch trees, a pool of water was lit with strong lighting, and the effect of shadow and light on the walls created by assistants stirring the water, breaking the reflection into shimmering, moving waves on the walls of the chamber. This set was inspired by Baroque churches (and served as example their research process described in Chapter 5). This surprisingly creative take on extant architecture combined with digital special effects create the mystical and fairy-tale like mood Walser evoked. Although they used the newest digital technologies to create these images, the animation sequences were images they had first used in the Stille Nacht shorts. They also began planning to punctuate the second feature film with puppet animation sequences. There is an increasing tendency, in their work to use digital effects, as is to be expected as digital generations of media technology replace analogue. The next feature project originally had over a hundred digital shots that were estimated at £700,000--almost a third of the provisional budget.

Institute Benjamenta was not the first feature-length live-action project. The Quays had been working on a feature with Passes provisionally titled 'The Sleepwalker', the project was proposed in 1993, but got no further than the script. Like Institute Benjamenta, it was planned to be mostly live-action. Griffith provided me with a press release on the film that was also published on one of the countless websites devoted to the Quays:

The film centres on the quintessential romantic--E.T.A. Hoffmann, and the romantic composers Hugo Wolf and Anton Bruckner. It is a fiction, and is more concerned with the attempted visualisation of the romantic mind and the imagination than with literal truth. Like Hoffmann's literature, the film aims to depict an imagined world in which both the banal and the commonplace are infused with the exotic and the incomprehensible.

Whilst Hoffmann labours at his work in a dilapidated theatre (both imagined and real), he also dreams and projects himself into the future lives and contrasting musical universes of Wolf and Bruckner. On stage Wolf's mental turmoil and musical frustration are depicted in a graphic world of marionettes and through the almost unbearable pain of his haunting and precise miniature songs with piano. During Wolf's chronic disintegration, he is comforted by his companion Melanie Kochert, even in the asylum to which he is finally committed. Bruckner, on his death bed is situated in a baroque organ loft--a metaphysical coffin--as though aloft in the flies of the same theatre. In his delirium, he imagines that he is attended by two Doctors, his faithful servant--Frau Kathi and the ghosts of the young girls with whom he was obsessed. Bruckner's symphonic universe creates an awesome contrast to that of Hugo Wolf. Throughout, Hoffmann is seen in his musical-poetic laboratory working and dreaming at his writing desk, which is positioned directly beneath the prompter's box at the front of theatre's stage. Above him floats a world of imagination and illusion.¹⁷

Although the film never got past the treatment stage, many of the themes--the banal and the commonplace, visual tropes, figures and the stylistic description--found their expression in Institute Benjamenta. Others--the Baroque, automata, the imagined

¹⁷ "Sleepwalkers of Daylight."

worlds, madness and incomprehensibility--filtered obliquely into In Absentia and some are reworked and woven into the Quays' second feature film project. After Institute Benjamenta, there was a five-year hiatus in short film production at Koninck Studios. They began developing a treatment for a script collaboration with Alan Passes that also was to be infused with themes from 'the Sleepwalker'.

The Piano Tuner of Earthquakes

Years ago, the Quays gave me a bound script for a new film. On the cover was a black and white image of a man in what, judging by his apparel, appeared to be an 19th century drawing room with a telescope, wooden globes and other scientific instruments. Entitled "The Mechanical Infanta", the script was developed for Channel 4 and the 55 page scenario described a fantastic tale of love, abduction, madness and deliverance taking place in the permeable, somewhat sinister borders between nature, imagination and artifice. The story abounded with metaphysical elements intermingled with scientific experiment set in a world commanded by a demiurge. For over ten years, while making films, designing stage sets and engaging in other collaborations, they continued to refine the script, co-written with Passes, that went through stages of rewriting, from a story about a Wagnerian character called Droz¹⁸ who abducts an opera singer to be his 'philosopher's stone and the key to immortality. Originally inspired by "The Invention of Morel", a slim text of sixty pages written by Adolfo Bioy Casares, a contemporary of Borges, to which the Quays could not obtain the rights, so the project shifted. Other authors the Quays engaged with at the time are exemplified by the Latin American magic realism figures of Raymond Roussel (whose Locus Solus was also an inspiration for the film) and Gabriel García Márquez. Magic realism originated in the 1920s in visual arts and painting, incorporating elements of surrealism and art brut. In its literary form, it is astonishingly similar to writings of Kafka and Schulz in that its' authors illuminate the secret lives of everyday objects and events. The innate difference between the Quays' puppet animation films and the features is that these illuminations—animated sequences in both films—do not take place in a hermetic, animistic realm but are incorporated into the realism implicit in photoindexical live action filmmaking. The dreamy, almost sublime sets and lighting and the visual styles of the film are populated by actors and the poetics of their puppet animation gives way

¹⁸ The character is named after Pierre Jaquet-Droz, creator of numerous automata in the 18th century. Best known is 'The Writer'.

to new visual and narrative themes transmuted into a cinematographic tour de force of directorial professionalism with the international cast.

The Piano Tuner of Earthquakes was a tripartite co-production of the German Mediopolis film and television production (Alexander Ris), Illumination Films and Koninck (Keith Griffiths), and Lumen Films France (Hengameh Panahi), supported by other funders in France, Germany and the UK.¹⁹ Terry Gilliam, a long-time animation co-conspirator, friend and admirer of the Quays, was an Executive Producer. Gilliam's enthusiasm for the project was unabashed: "Audiences are searching for a chance to journey into completely new, untravelled, mind-stimulating universes . . . the very kind of films the Brothers Quay create."²⁰ The Quays managed to keep to their ensemble-like working methods by ensuring that many of those involved in the film worked on Institute Benjamenta. Key crew members included Jankowski, who composed the music, screenplay author Passes, choreographer Brandstrup, costume designer Kandis Cook (who worked with them on the dance films and some of Brandstrup's ballets) and cameraman Knowland.²¹

The film's overarching automaton theme is embedded in an amour fou set in an indeterminate period of the first quarter of the 20th century. The island location was inspired by Arnold Böcklin's 'Insel der Toten' (Isle of the Dead), and the juxtaposition of imperious logic and alchemy is a fertile terrain for the Quays' visual and lyrical imaginations. The film opens in an opera house, and in the course of the performance singer Malvina (Amira Casar) is abducted by Dr. Emmanuel Droz (Gottfried John, who played Herr Benjamenta in the first feature). Apparently lifeless, Droz transports her to his isolated Villa Azucena where he plans to bring her back to life using mysterious methods he has discovered. Her fiancé, Adolfo Blin (Cesar Sarachu, one of the students in Institute Benjamenta) searches for her in vain. Droz's villa is surrounded by gardens and forest and Malvina reappears, though only half-alive: she is almost immobile, her gaze blank yet painful, her movements lifeless and uninspired, wavering in an undead state. Droz's plans are slowly revealed; in his megalomaniacal love for her and her voice, and as an unsuccessful opera composer, he puts her through endless nights of rehearsal for an opera of his own that he plans to use to celebrate his own elated and distorted vision of himself. At the performance in front of his guests, he plans to transfer his own life force into the half-alive Malvina for two selfish reasons: to unite himself forever with Malvina and to revenge

¹⁹ PianoTuner Presskit.

²⁰ <http://www.smart.co.uk/dreams/tgapr02.htm>

²¹ This is the first time the Quay Brothers collaborated with an art director, this role was assigned to Eric Veenstra

himself on the opera world who, in the past, have rejected his own musical compositions.

To help with his plans, Droz recruits an unwitting piano tuner, Felisberto (also played by Sarachu) to tend to his instruments. He is shown around by Droz's housekeeper and lover Assumpta (Assumpta Serna) who initiates him in to the workings, routines and laws of Droz's realm. Felisberto discovers that the instruments are actually hydraulically driven automata that rely on tidal currents and have a strange influence on the flow of life in Droz's villa. He discovers Malvina and, because he resembles her betrothed so much, he is able to pull her into a higher level of consciousness, eventually falling in love with her. Droz, in the meantime, is proceeding with his villainous plans, and Felisberto realises he must rescue Malvina at all risks. Assumpta begins to take more than a passing interest in Felisberto and becomes aware of Felisberto's intentions and oscillates between bad and good, between her tainted and fading love with Droz and in her jealousy for Malvina, Droz's new object of desire. finish

There are themes in this film that revisit those of the first feature: the amour fou between Droz and Malvina recalls the incestual and erotic undertones between Herr Benjamenta, Jakob and Alice in *Institute Benjamenta*; Felisberto's character reminds us of Jakob, who was also the innocent initiate into a bizarre and sinister world dominated by a madman (Herr Benjamenta); the 'living' architectures of Droz's villa and Institute controlled by invisible undercurrents; the clutch of detached, silent gardeners recalls Lisa's devoted pupils, and both of the madmen's 'realms' are either laid to waste or abandoned at the end of the films. Central visual motifs reappear in a new form here and the aesthetic design of the Quays dance films seems to coalesce in The Piano Tuner of Earthquakes. Flowing fabrics, generous spaces shot with deep focal planes, light that penetrates umbrous corners and caresses Assumpta's curves. Yet there are many instances when the film is distinct from the first feature. This is a crisper film, less geographically tied to a particular cultural space-time, and it is one of the few films that seems to have a representation of nature that is not under a glass bell jar--there is a horizon, and the spatial disorientation of the shorts has given way to spatial continuity. Perhaps the most striking difference that sets this film apart from all their previous ones, that often have the cinematic feel of silent cinema, is that The Piano Tuner of Earthquakes is not dominated by the images and music: dialogues and human interaction endow a real sense of narrative that is driven by voices, whispers and breathing. Costantini

Where this auditory container of sounds is possibly present is in all the short films with an integration of live action and puppets, and in Institute Benjamenta. The Piano Tuner of Earthquakes does not abandon this sound perspective, but the size of the scenarios and the diversity of locations and places--plus a beautiful but more conventional score by Trevor Duncan and Christopher Slaski (far from the exoticism of Leszek Jankowski) make the film lack homogeneity in that respect."

The visual texture of The Piano Tuner of Earthquakes is both ornate and subtle: besides a few other short scenes, including the opera house sets and a scene of Felisberto during his train journey to Droz, most of the film takes place in a highly artificial, theatre-like setting in and around Droz's villa. The theme of two worlds persists in this film as well: outside, in the gardens and forest, a dry, pinecone-y, airy Mediterranean atmosphere dominates, while within the villa's various chambers and rooms, architectural elements meld with ornate furniture, automata and weathered walls. The seven sets were fragments that could be moved around and collaged together; the Quays' familiarity with the 1:25 scale for opera design was significant in this, and perhaps more significant is the use of green screen for most of the interior scenes. Occasionally inside and outside seem to meld, as in the scenes when Malvina is sitting at the edge of a pool of water that, in its lighting and mise-en-scène, exudes the artificiality of stage design familiar from their work in opera and theatre. What is most striking is the essential Baroque quality of the film in the interiors and presentation of the film's characters, and the stylistic complexity of this seventeenth century style has much in common with the Quays' own aesthetic, especially in the treatment of light, the haptic quality of their films that appeals to the senses, and the combination of differing art forms. The painterly quality of the images is remarkable with a range that includes and reaches beyond the Baroque, especially in the Quays' treatment of light. This is not to say the film is derivative--it appears much more to be a new rendering of light that can align the film to contemporary Neo-Baroque manifestations in cinema. Compositional elements of the Spanish painter Diego Velázquez seem to be palimpsested in interior cast scenes, and the group shots with the gardeners, indoor scenes and medium shots of Malvina and Felisberto are suffused with a quality like the Dutch masters of light Jan Vermeer and Rembrandt van Rijn. The more umbrous scenes remind one of Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio and Francisco de Goya. All of these painters were alive during the

Baroque period. Angela Ndalianis' reflections on the baroque are seemly descriptions for the film's world:

Not only is nature a teacher, but past emblems of human creation serve to reignite the human imagination to conjure new creations. Reflecting a specifically baroque attitude to art, the kunstkammer and wunderkammer embodied the baroque function of the fragment and the ruin: References to the past that existed within this microcosmic space coexisted with objects and creations of the present.²²

New Expressionism: A Twist Point

In Institute Benjamenta, Marks suggests eroticism is reserved mostly for objects, while the humans in their films experience sexual repression or frustration²³ The new film does continue with this theme, but some of the humans, Assumpta in particular, break with it and we revel in the sensual generosity of her liquid eyes, pillowy lips, inviting shoulders and erotically charged stocking-clad thighs. The way the camera rests on Malvina's stillness elicits a sense of divination that can be related to the Baroque, to Neoplatonism and to what Victoria Nelson terms Neoexpressionism: "consciously or (most often) unconsciously, the New Expressionism revives the system of a living cosmos in which all things in this world exist in a hierarchy of interconnections with one another and with a timeless, invisible otherworld".²⁴ The vitalist and animistic concepts that have been invoked throughout this book are contained in Nelson's descriptions of New Expressionism. Her list of authors includes Will Self and Steve Weiner, whose The Museum of Love was inspired by the Quays (and for which they designed the book cover) and she names filmmakers including Tim Burton, David Lynch and others, with an explicit focus on Lars von Trier. She suggests that European New Expressionists "remain within the high-art tradition".²⁵ Moving towards a conclusion, I will explore some of Nelson's defining features of New Expressionism that underpin the Quays' shift in thematics towards cinematic magic realism.

Reification--concretisation of an abstract idea, the inspiration for an object, a space or a movement—is a prominent feature of their puppets and objects, perhaps

²² Ndalianis, 2004, p. 62

²³ Marks, 2002, p. 132

²⁴ Nelson, 2001, p. 214.

²⁵ Nelson, 2001, p. 214.

best exemplified by their transmutations of Schulz's 'generation aequivoca'. I would like to speculate on another progression that seems to be emerging in the Quays development as artists and filmmakers: a transition from literary-inspired metaphysical concepts from the later puppet animation films into a poetic live-action cinema that reveals the Platonic otherworldliness of not only objects, but also the live-action characters. In particular it is Malvina, a living automaton, who most clearly marks this progression from object to living automaton, a synthesis of the material and immaterial world. But it is also in the highly artificial and stylised mise-en-scène of the garden that takes former miniaturised theatres and makes them accessible to humans in the film, and this live-action shooting adds a realism to the film that is distinct from the hermetic animated realms. In the past, the Quays, in their own words, have treated the actors with as much respect as their puppets. What seems to be a new direction is that the emotional expression of the living actors is imbued with vitalist and animistic concepts that heretofore were reserved for animated puppets and metaphysical machines. Brian Massumi suggests "The new expressionism derivable from a rethinking of beauty is not a spontaneist individualism, far from it: it is impersonal Matter that does the expressing."²⁶ Instead of hapless machines and noncompossible puppets that act out the 'generation aequivoca' of inanimate matter, human beings are caught in a fraught tension of undercurrent forces of logical and illogical possibilities that introduce a philosophical notion of contingency in terms of what cannot be discerned as true or false. The new direction the Quays have taken with this film is material exemplification of a concept in living actors, rather than objects and spaces. The beauty of Malvina and her transformation into an automaton, living, but 'impersonal matter', is a new development from the Quays' earlier works that achieved what Herbert Marcuse addressed about reification in the contexts of artistic works, that "All reification is a forgetting. Art fights reification by making the petrified world speak, sing, perhaps dance."²⁷ In magic realism, metaphor is reified, but in human form; Droz's intent is to unite his soul with Malvina's body, and throughout most of the film we see her, almost immobilised, in a sort of living death, but living and breathing. Her inner stasis, caused by Droz's resurrection of her, is apparent in her movements and actions, and she becomes a reification of Droz's concept of immortality.

Magic realism also aims to subvert established and accepted discourses in Western science and knowledge: by invoking a metaphysical live-action realm the

²⁶ Massumi, 1997, p. 748.

²⁷ Marcuse, Herbert, 1978, p. 73

Quays' film undermines expectations of logic, physical laws and the rejection of non-empirical knowledge that abounds outside of positivistic science and thought.

Nelson discusses the ringing bells suspended in the air at the end of von Trier's Breaking the Waves, stating that "Not just the inner, but the transcendental, is made visible in the physical landscape."²⁸ In some ways this is akin to magic realism's technique to concretise, or reify, immaterial ideas. The Quays achieve a fantastic that is simultaneously 'of-this-earth': Malvina is an automaton, but at the same time she is able to respond emotionally to Felisberto. Another feature of magic realism that relates to Nelson's ideas is that psychological and emotional concepts have ontological equivalents, ontological in a metaphysical sense--for what Nelson calls the transcendental. Droz's plan to literally unite himself with Malvina is an example of this, and the end of the film depicts a concrete example.

Another feature Nelson highlights is that of the supernatural: "The supernatural is no longer only the grotesque."²⁹ Again it is Malvina: an automaton, but somehow half-alive, she embodies a physical beauty that is distinct from the grotesque puppets in the Quays' earlier films. The supernatural is no longer a pairing of animal and human attributes. Malvina is pure sensuality, a Snow White in a Hoffmanesque arrested state. And in magic realism's terms, the natural and realistic setting of the forest and gardens is at a tension with the fantastic nature of Droz's world. Because the garden retains a link to the natural world, and at the same time is located in Droz's realm, it upsets the realist connection to this link. Nelson suggests further that "[a] high-art edifice is constructed on a low-art foundation. . . . The best New Expressionists do not engage with the repetition compulsion of formula narrative, either within or across stories."³⁰ The Quays have been asked to respond to divisions between high and low art, and that they are often being viewed as 'elitist':

Neither of us maintains that high/low barrier. We've always worked across a wide range of projects and commissions, whether it was MTV stings or interludes, pop promos, commercials or to designing decors for the theatre, opera or ballet or even doing a feature film. Clearly each project has its own parameters which you try to solve and acquit. However, there is in us a more public vs private side, i.e. certain works are intended for a private shade as opposed to public sunlight.³¹

²⁸ Nelson, 2001, p. 215.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 216.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Quay Brothers, correspondence with Chris Robinson, 2001.

The Quays' narrative in the second feature is reminiscent not only of Hoffmann, Kleist and Jules Verne. It combines a breadth of genres, including also significant elements of the fantastic, the supernatural and science fiction, and these indicate a shift from the predominantly animistic and vitalist features of earlier works. Besides being inspired by Jules Verne's "Le Château des Carpathes," the film revisits traces and themes of H.G. Wells' The Island of Dr. Moreau, a dystopic literary allegory that was appropriated by the pulp presses as science fiction and was the subject of a number of what are now considered cult pictures.

Yet another defining feature of New Expressionism: "Cliché is likewise deliberate, nonironic, and serves a higher purpose as allegory." Within a culture based on a materialist worldview, cliché is the only avenue back to allegory, because it is the sole arena in which hyperstylisation, a precondition of allegory, is possible."³² A cliché the Quays use is perhaps best embodied in the part in the Dr. Moreau / 'Mad scientist' stereotype of Droz: he is convinced of the magical properties of his inventions and his plan to integrate his own life essence into Malvina's shell. In a sense, Droz's convictions and the acceptance of them by his servants and Assumpta establishes his fantastic world as realistic in the film's diegesis. Communicating the narrative through Droz, who is completely sure of his hyperstylised world, makes the spectator unsure as to who is mad--he or Felisberto, who, although he aims to rescue Malvina and in planning to do so, represents a link to the real world outside of Droz', at the same time he must believe in Droz's inventions and 'magic' if he feels the need to rescue her. In her introduction, Nelson proposes "Expressionism and Surrealism both based their aesthetics on the notion of an identity between internal and external realities."³³ At this point in their creative practice, one that has shifted from exclusively animated films to live-action inter punctuated with animation sequences, I suggest the Quays have moved from the initial buttonholing of Neosurrealism into related, but new fields of Neo-Baroque—evident in the visual, stylistic and narrative excess in the works--and Neoexpressionism.

No one likes to be pigeonholed. What some people dislike is 'slippage' over the edge. They want you to remain numbered and compartmentalised in your box, otherwise it is unfair to others. On top of

³² Nelson, 2001, p. 216.

³³ Ibid., p. x.

that, they'll convince you that you are totally free inside your pigeonhole--
i.e. the one that's been allotted to you by them.³⁴

Thyrza Nichols Goodeve suggested to the twins that they are really materialists, not surrealists: Their reply: "Yes, because the material is generated, not invented. We just see it. People do sort of want to stick the label 'surrealist' on us, but the world gives these things up to us--they really happen."³⁵ The Quays' recent work in film continues to mediate the invisible world of objects, but enfolds this into an environment that is a hybrid of live action and animation, a form of media convergence, as with their earlier films, continues to draw on interdisciplinary sources for inspiration. That 'these things really happen' Sallust's phrase, the title of the next chapter, may provide a clue to where the Quays work will continue to evolve--exploring things that never happen but are part of a rich tradition of noumenal experience, fantasy and imagination.

³⁴ Quay Brothers correspondence with Chris Robinson, 2001.

³⁵ Nichols Goodeve, 1196, 118.

Chapter 11. These Things Never Happen but Are Always

Then, after the purely trick-picture is disciplined till it has fewer tricks, and those more human and yet more fanciful, the producer can move on up into the higher realms of the fairy-tale, carrying with him this riper workmanship.

Vachel Lindsay, The Art of the Moving Picture

The Quays' live action and puppet animation films are a hybrid body of works that is informed by a conceptual dialectics rooted in profound knowledge of the histories and aesthetics of painting, illustration, architecture including the -isms of Modernist art practice, poetry and cinema. Turvey's words ring true to the reaction viewers often try to articulate about the Quays' works:

To speak of being struck, overwhelmed, saddened, or horrified by a film, to express the feeling of total absorption, rapt attention, or loss of consciousness in a film, to venerate films, like photographs and paintings, as special, fetishised objects in their own right, is to describe a sensuous experience in which the film itself, as a concrete object, plays a major if not determining role.¹

The sensuousness of the Quays' films lies both in their haptic qualities and in the Quays' selection and treatment of the materials they use in puppet animation.² The Quays' films on the whole give greater attention to mise-en-scène and the marginal, are more associative than narrative. In their own words:

In fact we ask of our machines and objects to act as much if not more than the puppets . . . as for what is called the scenario: at most we have only a limited musical sense of its trajectory, and we tend to be permanently open to vast uncertainties, mistakes, disorientations, as though lying in wait to trap the slightest fugitive 'encounter'.³

¹ Turvey, in Allan and Smith, 1997, p. 433.

² The themes of sensuality, pathosexuality and eroticism in their films have only been touched upon here and I plan to engage with them more intensely in future.

³ Quay Brothers, 1986.

In their substance and their encyclopaedic references, the Quay Brothers' films represent a cinematic analogy or embodiment of the concepts proposed by Zielinski in Chapter 1--this may be the 'wow' their films evoke in their viewers and critics.

Towards a Poetics

This book has illuminated, contextualised and explicated prominent cinematic, aesthetic and technical parameters and systems that are unique features of the Quay Brothers' work in animated and live action cinema. I have described an aesthetic system that, while in continuous development in the course of their filmmaking, is prevalent throughout their works. Their poetics can be summarised by the following features and devices:

Vitalist and animistic cosmogony

Reification of a generatio aequivoca via automata, vitalism and animism

Puppet typology of portmanteau puppets, metaphysical machines and insecticity

Labyrinthine space, spatial collage and spatial uncertainty

Systematised dislocutory spatial logic

Animated light, macro lenses and a choreographic camera

Musical montage dialectics

Disruptions of the miniature

Small scale to grand scale

Magic realism and Neoexpressionism

These aesthetic and technical devices and visualisation of philosophical and literary concepts create a pleasurable apprehension during viewing. The formal properties and aesthetic devices are not unique to any one of the films explored; it is their particular combination throughout the Quays' continuing body of work that results in the their poetics, which can also be described as analogous to the 'world' of the films. Some concepts from Neoformalist analysis are useful to summarise these features, including Kristin Thompson's definition of the dominant, which is:

the concrete structures within the work of foregrounded, defamiliarized devices and functions, interacting with subordinated, automatized ones.

From the spectator's perspective, we might say that the dominant governs

the perceptual-cognitive "angle" that we are cued to adopt in viewing a film against its backgrounds. The dominant is thus crucial in relating an artwork to history.⁴

The interdisciplinary artistic and creative contexts and backgrounds I have described as influential in the Quays' praxis places them in a historical continuum of artists, authors and filmmakers concerned with revealing and explicating human experience that is not present or tangible in the phenomenal world, experience that is communicated via cinematic metaphor, animated imagery and dislocutory dialectics. The works analysis has not been concerned with subordinated, automatised devices and functions that are found in many animation films. It has centred on the foregrounded, non-automatised devices in Street of Crocodiles that originate in techniques the Quays developed and explored before this film's release in 1986 that were refined and expanded upon in the ensuing productions and these devices have eventually developed into poetic functions in the Quays' opus, and some have become functions. Thompson:

Functions are important in relating the work to history. Devices themselves become automatized quite easily, and the artist may replace them with new devices that are more defamiliarising. But functions tend to remain more stable, since they are renewed by a change of device, and they persist longer historically than do individual devices.⁵

The Quays' puppet animation films also contains subordinated, automatised formal elements and functions that are familiar to the spectator through his or her knowledge of other puppet animation films (anthropomorphism, self-reflexivity). These interrelate Street of Crocodiles to the artistic works that the Quays declare as their influences. Animation viewers have become accustomed to these and part of the reason they can engage with the foregrounded and defamiliarised devices in the Quays' films is their familiarity with automatised functions that are found in the films of Svankmajer, Lenica, Borowczyk and others. The viewer's familiarity with these animation film conventions, automatised as they are, are defamiliarised them to different degrees and embedded in the new devices. One that is prominent throughout their works is the Quays' montage style of connecting the sets disrupts

⁴ Thompson, 1988, p. 91.

⁵ Ibid., p. 15.

our expectations of the spatial relations of 'beside, through, in and beyond'. This entails what Jordi Costa calls an exploration customary in the Quays' films:

This is as close as we get to narrative linking: an exploration understood as progressive discovery of a subjective space, as a mental potholing, like the loss of one's self in one's own maze, a twisted universe, compartmentalised and extensive and which could be inhabited by something terrible.⁶

If we immerse ourselves in the fiction, then we develop an imagination of what lies beyond that is based on the intellectual uncertainty of the film's labyrinth. The interiors of most of the puppet animation films, Rehearsals for Extinct Anatomies or The Comb, for instance seem to be airtight. It is hard to imagine a gust of wind ever disturbed the accrued, sedimentary dust that glows softly in the bright light that infiltrates these spaces. These are akin to Bachelard's drawers, chests and wardrobes, like a "lovingly fashioned casket [that] has interior perspectives that change constantly as the result of daydream. We open it and discover that it is a dwelling-place, that a house is hidden in it."⁷ Bachelard's unparalleled phenomenological exploration of spaces evoked in literature and poetry relates these to the creative imagination of memory and dream. The spaces evoked in the literature the Quays base some of their films on are dreamscapes, bits and pieces of memory and past experience put together to elicit an altogether unique personal perception of the authors. These sealed-off spaces and small architectures are often spatially organised combinations of miscellaneous items and fragmented remains of someone's history that found its way to the Quays' studio.

In the Quays' films, the temporal form of the present is replaced by a metaphysical space and time that is often marked by shifts to and from live-action sequences. There are many instances and scenes throughout the films where any sense of narrative structure is suspended--a hiatus that provides screen time for us to linger in the aesthetic experience of the Quays' artistic vision. Mise-en-scène, camera and lenses, lighting and montage are formal parametric elements that create the spatio-temporal realm of the film and the Quays' spatial rhetorical tactics create a deliberate disorientation that is another device of the film. Formally, most of their

⁶ Costa, 2001, p. 44.

⁷ Bachelard, 1994, p. 86.

films break with most classical cinematic editing conventions, such as establishing and intermediate shots, the trio master shot, close-up and reaction shot.

Moving from inside to outside, from the film set to the urban environment, and, perhaps, into concerns that would suggest the Quays are Postmodernist filmmakers, Vidler remarks on some of the strategies architects are using today for what he calls a 'posturbanist sensibility'.

Preoccupied with traces and residues--the material of dreamwork--rather than with the new, writers and architects have increasingly found ways to chart the underground reverberations of the city. In their ascriptions, territoriality becomes unfixed, camouflaged and dug-in . . . subjectivity is rendered heterogeneous, nomadic, self-critical in vagabond environments that refuse the commonplaces of hearth and home in favour of the uncertainties of no-man's land.⁸

The Quays' extreme stylisation of the streets, corridors, rooms, objects and puppets are literally made of traces and residues, and in their intertextuality they create a new text. In the features, the 'underground reverberations' of the animistic world transmute into the live-action realm as well.

The material of dreamwork leads me to another aspect of the Quays' films, one that may explain in part the engagement their works incite in many viewers. Jane Bennett offers a profoundly ethical and hopeful alternative to the crisis of what she terms the "disenchantment tale" of modernity and contemporary life--"a place of dearth and alienation and of control."⁹ She proposes an alternate tale, one that is highly pertinent to concepts of vitalism, filled with what she calls "sites of enchantment that include: "the discovery of sophisticated modes of communication among nonhumans, the strange agency of physical systems at far-from-equilibrium states, and the animation of objects by video technologies and animation whose effects are not fully captured by the idea of 'commodity fetishism'. For the informed viewer of the Quays' work, there is an oscillation between awareness that animation is based, at least profilmically, in the real world, and the immersive experience of representations of animistic, vitalist objects where the same object has different attributes when animated than not (which is not the same as an epistemological distinction which would be different viewpoints on the same object). The Quays'

⁸ Vidler, 1992, p. 13.

⁹ Bennett, 2001, pp. 3-5.

animated noncompossible portmanteau puppets share properties with what Bennett describes as metamorphing creatures in film and literature--a deliberate bug, an aerial goat, an organless body--pace Deleuze--that are interspecies and intraspecies crossings in a state of becoming.¹⁰ (the category of 'winged, finned' or 'beaked' mental models Grodal described in Chapter 6) Bennett then describes what is responsible for their having the power to enchant:

their magic resides in their mobility, that is, in their capacity to travel, fly, or transform themselves . . . Metamorphing creatures enact the very possibility of change; their presence carries with it the traces of dangerous but also exciting and exhilarating migrations.¹¹

This magic is inherent in animation's principles of illusory movement of otherwise static and lifeless forms. By feeling empathy with animated forms and figures, spectators can experience an otherness and, perhaps, joy and enchantment, that, in turn, can relieve the sense of dearth, isolation and alienation that the disenchantment tale of information culture propagates. The animistic loci of the Quays' filmic universe allows us to experience an enchanting utopia, a 'no place', the literal English translation of the Latin word, a utopian space and set of conditions which challenges any analysis based on historically changing norms, devices, systems and functions. The Quays defamiliarise it through their use of technical and stylistic innovation described in this book. In the past twenty years, this device has since become automatised in its repeated use by other animators who emulate the Quays: their films are the starting point of this historical continuum.

The Quays have called Schulz's 'apocryphal thirteenth month' the greatest metaphor for them: "It's everything that animation embodies and where its greatest freedom lies. Creating a realm, a universe that is totally self-sufficient in its freakiness."¹² This metaphor is present in many of the films. It also exhibits a cinematic analogy of a number of the primary processes of language events as described by Freud, whereby the primary process is mainly visual: shortening, condensation, replacement, asyntactic blending, contextlessness, meaninglessness and symbol building.¹³ This is a key poetic device in their work, and one it shares with 'self-sufficient universes' created in poetic films like Chris Markers La Jetée

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 17.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Habib, 2001.

¹³ Goeppert, 1973, p. 79.

(1962) Alain Resnais' Last Year in Marienbad (1963), and Patrick Bokanowski's L'ange (1982). In Chapter 1, I introduced Deleuze's idea that "[a] work of art is a new syntax, one that is much more important than vocabulary and that excavates a foreign language in language".¹⁴ The Quays' body of works has a unique and persistent stylistic and aesthetic visual language, one that uses a complex range of imagery in cinema and plastic and literary arts that create visual neologisms in the particular animated space-time that are the 'true characters' of the films. The 'understanding' of this language varies from viewer to viewer, and a spectator initiated in these references may better equipped to participate in ordering apparently unrelated images or spatialities.

This intertextuality, this 'new syntax' is in part created by the palimpsest qualities of the Quays' work with redundant and salvaged materials. In her essay on the ephemeral, mnemonic and haptic qualities of QuickTime internet films, Sobchack draws parallels between experiencing the Quays' films and the works of Joseph Cornell, in particular his boxes:

Both QuickTime "movies" and Cornell boxes also salvage "the flotsam and jetsam" of daily life and redeem it as "used" material whose re-collected and remembered presence echoes with bits and traces of an individual yet collective past: personal memories, narratives, histories that were, from the first, commodified and mass-mediated.¹⁵

Sobchack's observations on the redemption of materials resonates both with the motifs in the triumvirate of authors discussed and with the Quays' collage aesthetic. In a sense, the process of reification, that is, of transforming an idea or concept into a material thing, is reversed, in that the origins and histories of these objects return to the fore. Un-commodified from their original purpose, they are re-mediated by the Quays through their integration into a metaphysical narrative. Sobchack footnotes an essay from Annette Michelson that lists twelve characteristics of Cornell's work, ten of which she considers are characteristic of QuickTime internet 'films'. These are:

affirmative use of the frame; use of found materials; assemblage or montage as the organizing principle; play with and variation on scale; the implication of temporal flow and its arrest; narrative tension; rhythmic use

¹⁴ Flaxman, 2000, p. 370.

¹⁵ Sobchack, 1999, unpaginated.

of compositional elements; repetition and variation; the use of color to make space ambient; and the use of other artworks as material.¹⁶

It is astonishing how all of these characteristics apply to the Quays' set designs and use of other cinematic parameters. Towards her conclusions, Sobchack ponders the "half-life" feature of QuickTime "movies" that she relates to animation film and to Quays' films in particular:

I associate [QuickTime "movies"] with those forms of animated film that foreground the cinema's usually hidden struggle to achieve the "illusion of life"¹⁷--with the works of Jan Svankmajer or the Brothers Quay in which kinetic objects inhabit miniaturized worlds and achieve a laboriously animated life that somehow (and at some deep and molecular level) reminds us of the labor of our own.¹⁸

These remarks are extremely apposite for puppet animation, and especially for the Quays' aesthetic, that is a combination of homage to appropriated art-historical and literary inspirations and a distinct artisanship in their transmutation of these into the singular cinematic works of art. Unlike Cornell's boxes, Duchamp's 'readymades' or Schulz or Walser's texts, the Quays' works are time-based media. This adds to their complexity, in that the viewer is not only confronted by the exquisite, sometimes ravaged beauty of the constructions: he or she must be capable of entering into the metaphysical aspects that the animation of these objects call forth, the 'deep molecular level' that is made accessible by the vitalist, animistic expression of the Quays' films. The Quays' transformation of literary spatial motifs into objects, and then cinematic images, is ultimately a specifically aesthetic process of reification, in that they interpret them through concrete or material forms and constructions. Literary daydreams and perceptual epiphanies become the sets and fragmented spaces, the "dwelling-places" of the puppets and 'metaphysical machines'.

According to Thompson, the dominant is: "the main formal principal a work or group of works uses to organise devices into a whole. The dominant will pervade the work, governing and linking small-scale devices to large-scale ones; through the

¹⁶ Michelson, Annette, 1973, 54, quoted in Sobchack, 1999

¹⁷ Footnote 8 in Sobchack, 1999: "The phrase here, as well as thoughts about the animated film's struggle to achieve--and to not achieve--this illusion is derived from Alan Cholodenko, ed., *The Illusion of Life: Essays on Animation* (Sydney: The Australian Film Commission/Power Publications, 1991)."

¹⁸ Sobchack, 1999.

dominant, the stylistic, narrative, and thematic levels will relate to each other."¹⁹ Street of Crocodiles foregrounds devices and functions that are highly artistic in nature. The animation technique and its ability to create metaphysical and uncanny images, shots and scenes open up the formal potential of the filmmaking process. Thompson suggests that "the dominant is bound up with the defamiliarizing properties of the work".²⁰ The 'surprise' or dynamic of Street of Crocodiles is a combination of automatised elements of puppet animation (collage puppet construction, anthropomorphism, self-reflexivity) with defamiliarised ones--the unusual, art-historical references imbued in the mix of materials used in puppet construction and uncanny architectures (device 1); aesthetics in camera, lighting and lenses that use live-action shooting and camera principles (device 2) and music-based montage (device 3). This brings us to the concept of motivation. Thompson:

Transtextual motivation, the third of our four types [compositional, realistic, transtextual and artistic] involves any appeal to conventions of other artworks, and hence it can be as varied as the historical circumstances allow. In effect, the work introduces a device that is not motivated adequately within its own terms, but that depends on our recognition of the device from our past experience.²¹

Less concerned with compositional and realistic motivation, the most of the Quays' works originate in transtextual and artistic motivation. Devices that we can allocate to transtextual motivation are the references they make in their films to other artists, filmmakers and authors. Their films make reference to or are explicitly inspired by other artworks; this is why this book has explored other creative disciplines including literature, music, fine arts, illustration and architecture. The transtextual motivation is informed by their artistic choices and motivations to develop and embed motifs familiar from these other artworks into their own style. The Quays' transtextual motivation lies in combining homage and mixing of stylistic elements from other artworks to create their own particular style. Because of the filmmakers' intimate knowledge of the artworks they refer to in the film, the spectator's aesthetic involvement in the film is challenged and rewarded in moments of recognition of these references. But this requires a certain familiarity with these works.

¹⁹ Thompson, p. 43.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 91.

²¹ Ibid., p. 18.

Another type of motivation Thompson describes is artistic motivation, which she suggests is the most difficult to define:

In one sense, every device in an artwork has an artistic motivation, since it functions in part to contribute to the creation of the work's abstract, overall shape--its form. Yet many, probably most, devices have an additional, more prominent compositional, realistic, or transtextual motivation, and in these cases artistic motivation is not particularly noticeable--though we can deliberately shift our attention to the aesthetic qualities of the work's texture even if it is densely motivated. Yet in another sense, artistic motivation is present in a really noticeable and significant way only when the other three types of motivation are withheld.²²

Thompson refers to a particular type of artistic motivation--"the baring of the device", a term that refers to authors' foregrounding techniques and exposing conventions, that she explains as a type of artistic motivation that foregrounds the formal function of a given device or structure in the work. "A highly original artwork will bare the device a good deal to help cue spectators as to how to adjust their viewing skills to cope with the new and difficult devices in use."²³ The Quays bare the device when they foreground formal functions as hermetic enigmas within the film. These are the devices of uncanny, animistic puppets and architectures, labyrinthine narratives and musical montage that reveal the interpretation of authors' texts, the historicity and artistic relations to other artworks. In combination, they are the dominant of the Quays' works.

The dominant also helps us to disentangle the films labyrinthine, experimental narrative structure. Thompson suggests that "[t]he proairetic aspect of the narrative is a chain of causality that allows us to understand how one action is linked logically to others. The hermeneutic line consists of the set of enigmas the narrative poses by withholding information."²⁴ Street of Crocodiles is less committed to providing a causal chain or a logic of actions than it is to presenting a set of musically interlinked enigmas--this is the labyrinthine quality of their film. Since the enigmas are strongly aesthetic and artistic, the initial pleasure in deciphering the references to develop a schemata is confidence-building and enhanced by the pleasure of the hermeneutic

²² Ibid., p. 19.

²³ Ibid., p. 20.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 39

work that tries to find a syuzhet. This is achieved in part by the filmmakers' by 'baring the device'. The Quays provide the spectator with cues that help them develop their comprehension of the defamiliarised functions and new devices that are relevant for understanding films the Quays made after Street of Crocodiles (as well as reflecting on earlier films). It is in their use of conventions of live-action film, the foregrounding of the constructedness of their materials and self-referential animation techniques: ultimately, the baring of the devices provides a set of a posteriori knowledge for watching the Quays' other films. The defamiliarised functions and three devices are all informed by artistic motivation. The uncanny aspects of their set and puppet design result from the Quays' deep knowledge of the related artistic and literary contexts they are working in and to which they consciously refer. The labyrinth is created by innovative use of light and a disorienting and defamiliarised editing method that leans on live-action cinema editing. And finally, tone, music, pitch and timbre develop relational juxtapositions and emotional alliances between the music score and the 'organic' sounds and the imagery. These choreograph the interplay between the objects and spaces and suggest an abstract, yet emotionally laden musical narrative. I would put forth that these, combined with complex montage sequences to construct the 'realms', result in the 'something completely different' that surprises their viewers. As an exemplary artwork, a synthesis of the art forms it uses integrating multiple art forms, their body of animated films has all the connotations of a Gesamtkunstwerk, a total work of art or universal artwork that incorporates all forms of art (dance, poetry, painting, music, sculpture) to result in something more than the sum total of these.

The Beatification of Zero

As a culmination of their artistic work to date, the Piano Tuner of Earthquakes is a continuation of their creative and astonishing exploration, using their own uniquely developed parameters of cinema, of ways to make visible the powers of imagination and the world around us. In the current opus as it stands, the Quays are "authentic trappers" stalkers on a continuing artistic hunt of discovery in both a multiplicity of styles that is developmental and in terms of how they transform inspirational literary sources into their experimental narratives. The Quays' excursion into feature films and live-action dance films are by no means an indication of a move away from animation and the literature that inspires them: they intend to explore the potential which slumbers in the combination of these cinematic techniques, and are currently

working on a new project based on Bruno Schulz's Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass. A statement from a 2001 interview holds true for the present:

What still concerns us is the language of things: the hidden...the invisible...the withheld, and how to articulate them . . . Novalis said that in the genuine fairy tale, everything must be strange, mysterious and incoherent.²⁵

The formal possibilities inherent in animation can lend visualisation to the dreams, inner vision and narrative meanderings that are essential components of the Quays' cinematic transformations of text, poetry and imagination. For the Quays, the realm of animation will continue to be a favoured locus of future cinematic sojourn, expanded by other cinematic experiments, that all have human experience at their core:

Human perceptions function at such infinitely deeper and more complex levels than merely through our little intellectual, emotional or instinctive powers, and for us music is this "otherness" that begins to carry this fabulous range . . . But there are many meanings, not just one.²⁶

Seen as a whole, the Quay Brothers' works are independent of any definable genre; indeed, the imitation of their style that can be observed in films of other animators are a complimentary gesture to the auteur style they have developed. But I suggest they do and will continue to occupy a privileged position in contemporary culture, a culture that Nelson soberingly describes:

In our officially postreligious intellectual culture, we miss the idols, too. Just as the mad scientist still carries the negative but still highly charged projection of the holy man who would otherwise have no place in our living culture, the repressed religion is also visible in representations of puppets, robots, cyborgs, and other artificial humans in literature and film."²⁷

²⁵ Quay Brothers correspondence with Chris Robinson, 2001.

²⁶ Quay Brothers, in Rust Gray, unidentified section, 4.

²⁷ Nelson, 2001, p. 20.

The Quays characters, whether animated puppets or actors, can and do provide access to the many meanings related to metaphysics and Neoplatonic thought as discussed by Nelson that have been lost but not forgotten in our increasingly secular culture.

Throughout their opus, there is a progressive continuity in the Quays' artistic devotion to the marginal, to the insignificant and the unnoticed, quietly elevated into the sublime. The Quays suggest that: "Each film was a journey that had no end point, other than being at the centre of it. . . . And there were all the vague impulses and tuggings in which you hope to snag some tiny fragments of some deeper, elusive form".²⁸ Their films are unbound by contemporary settings, preferring to investigate what they call 'a poetry of shadowy encounters and almost conspiratorial secretness'. Whether commissioned or independently produced, 16mm frame-by frame animation film or digital compositing, the films retain the unique signature that informs their work over the past quarter century. In Institute Benjamenta, Walser's protagonist Jakob, having entered a school for servants, comes to terms with his potential and concludes: "One thing I know for certain: in later life I shall be a charming, utterly spherical zero."²⁹ Provocatively, his intimism self affirms as it self-dismisses. "I feel how little it concerns me," he muses in Institute Benjamenta, "everything that's called 'the world,' and how grand and exciting what I privately call the world is to me."³⁰ The Quays have their own ways of exploring: "We like going for long walks, metaphorically, into whatever country we go to--we could disappear in any country."³¹ On all their metaphysical and cinematic wanderings, the Quays, on their own or with like-minded companions, continue to pursue their own particular commitment to the 'Beatification of Zero'.

²⁸ Correspondence with Chris Robinson, 2001.

²⁹ Walser, 1995, p. 6.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 96.

³¹ Buchan, 1998:2, p. 15.

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- Institute Benjamenta (transl. Christopher Middleton © 1967) New York and London: Serpent's Tail, 1995.
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- "The Strings of the Marionette." In: Suzanne Buchan (Ed.) Animated 'Worlds', 39-48. Eastleigh: John Libbey Publishing, 2006.
- Weihsmann, Helmut. Cinetecture: Film Architektur, Moderne. Wien: PVS-Verlag, 1995.
- Weis, Elisabeth and John Belton (eds.). Film Sound: Theory and Practice. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985.
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- Whittock, Trevor. Metaphor and Film. Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1990.
- Wollen, Peter. Signs and Meaning in the Cinema. 1969. London: Marti Secker & Warburg and the BFI, 1969.
- Wright, Philippa Shirley. "Navigating a Metaphorical Zone: A Consideration of the Work of the Brothers Quay." B.A. thesis, fine art, Loughborough College of Art & Design, 1994.
- Wuss, Peter. Die Tiefenstruktur des Filmkunstwerks: zur Analyse von Spielfilmen mit offener Komposition. 1986. Berlin: Henschelverlag Kunst und Gesellschaft, 1990.
- Filmanalyse und Psychologie. Strukturen des Films im Wahrnehmungsprozess. Berlin: Ed. Sigma, 1993.
- Zelinski, Siegfried. Audiovisions. Cinema and Television as entr'actes in History (Audiovisionen. Kino und Fernsehen als Zwischenspiele in der Geschichte. 1989, transl. Gloria Custance). Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1999.
- "Supervision und Subversion. Für eine Anarchäologie des technischen Visionierens." in: Jörg Huber and Martin Heller, Interventionen 6: Konturen des Unentscheidenen. Stroemfeld / Roter Stern / Museum für Gestaltung Zurich. Basel / Zurich, 1997, pp 173-188.

Filmography

Der Loop der Loop, Il Duetto, Palais en Flammes, all 1970s
Nocturna Artificialia: Those Who Desire without End, 1979, color, 16 mm, 20 minutes.
Punch and Judy: Tragical Comedy or Comical Tragedy, directed by Keith Griffiths and the Quay Brothers, 1980, color, 16 mm, 47 minutes.
Ein Brudermord, 1980, color, 16 mm, 5 minutes.
The Eternal Day of Michel de Ghelderode, 1898–1962, 1981, color, 16 mm, 30 minutes.
Igor: The Paris Years Chez Pleyel, 1982, color, 16 mm, 26 minutes.
Leoš Janáček: Intimate Excursions, 1983, color, 16 mm, 26 minutes.
The Cabinet of Jan Švankmajer, 1984, color, 16 mm, 14 minutes.
The Songs of the Chief Officer of Hunar Louse, or This Unnameable Little Broom, 1985, color, 16 mm, 11 minutes.
Street of Crocodiles, 1986, color, 35 mm, 21 minutes.
Rehearsals for Extinct Anatomies, 1987, black-and-white, 35 mm, 14 minutes.
Stille Nacht 1 (Dramolet), 1988, black-and-white, 35 mm, 2 minutes.
Ex Voto, 1989, color, 35 mm, 1 minute.
The Comb {From the Museums of Sleep}, 1990, color and black-and-white, 35 mm, 17 minutes.
De Artificiali Perspectiva, or Anamorphosis, 1991, color, 35 mm, 14 minutes.
The Calligrapher, Parts I, II, III, 1991, color, 1 minute.
Stille Nacht II: Are We Still Married? 1992, black-and-white, 35 mm, 3 minutes.
Long Way Down (Look What the Cat Drug In), 1992, color, 35 mm, 4 minutes.
Stille Nacht III: Tales from the Vienna Woods [Ich bin im Tod erblüht], 1993, black-and-white, 35 mm, 4 minutes.
Stille Nacht IV: Can't Go Wrong without You, 1994, black-and-white, 35 mm, 4 minutes.
Institute Benjamenta, or This Dream People Call Human Life, 1995, black-and-white, 35 mm, 105 minutes.
Duet: Variations on the Convalescence of "A," 1999, choreography by William Tuckett, color, 35 mm, 18 minutes.
In Absentia, UK 2000, black-and-white and color, 35 mm (Cinemascope), 19 minutes (music: Karlheinz Stockhausen).
The Sandman, UK 2000, choreography by William Tuckett, 35 mm, black-and-white, 41 minutes.
Dog Door, UK 2001, color, 4 minutes.
Day of the Dead, 2001, black-and-white and color, 1 minute, animated sequence for Julie Taymor's *Frida* (2002).
The Phantom Museum, UK 2002, color, 35 mm, 12 minutes.
The PianoTuner of EarthQuakes, UK, Germany, France, 2005, color, 35 mm, 95 minutes.
Alice in Not So Wonderland, for Live Earth, UK 2008, color and black-and-white, 3 minutes.
Eurydice (She So Beloved), UK 2008, choreography by Kim Brandstrup, color and black-and-white, HD, 11 minutes.
Inventorium of Traces — at Castle Łańcut (Inventorium śladów — Jan Potocki na Zamku w Łańcucie), Poland, 2009, color, HD, 23 minutes.
Maska, Poland, 2010, color, 12 minutes.

Scenography and Décors for Theatre, Opera, & Ballet

Love for Three Oranges. Prokofiev. Opera directed by Richard Jones. Opera North Leeds / English National Opera, London, 1988.
Dybbuk. Ballet by Kim Brandstrup. The Place, London, 1988.
A Flea in Her Ear. Feydeau. Theater directed by Richard Jones. Old Vic, London, 1989.
Mazeppa. Tchaikovsky. Opera directed by Richard Jones. Bregenz

Festival/Nederlands Opera, 1991.
 Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme. Molière. Theater directed by Richard Jones. Royal National Theatre, London, 1992.
 A Midsummer Night's Dream. Shakespeare. Theater directed by Johnathan Miller. Almeida Theatre, London, 1996.
 The Hour We Knew Nothing of Each Other. Peter Handke. Theater ballet directed by Kim Brandstrup. Malmo Dramatiska Theatre, Sweden, 1996.
 Cupid & Psyche. Ballet by Kim Brandstrup. Royal Danish Ballet, Copenhagen, 1997.
 The Chairs. Ionesco. Theater directed by Simon McBurney. Theatre de Complicite and Royal Court, London, 1997.
 Baa-Laamsfest. Olga Neuwirth. Opera directed by Nicholas Broadhurst. Wiener Festwochen, Vienna, 1999.
 Queen of Spades. Ballet by Kim Brandstrup. Les Grands Ballets Canadiens, Montreal, 2001.
 The Wind in the Willows. Ballet by William Tuckett. Royal Opera House, London, 2002.
 Death and Resurrection. J. S. Bach and Steve Martland. Conducted by Sir John Eliot Gardiner, Steve Martland. Four short films illustrating Martland's Street Songs. Tate Modern, London, 2003.
 The Anatomy of a Storyteller. Ballet by Kim Brandstrup. Royal Opera House, London, 2004.
 The Cricket Recovers. Richard Ayres. Opera directed by Nicholas Broadhurst. Aldeburgh/ Almeida Opera, London, 2005.
 Paul Bunyan. Benjamin Britten. Operetta directed by Nicholas Broadhurst. Theater am Kornmarkt Bregenz/ Theater Luzern, 2007.
 Bring Me the Head of Ubu Roi. Color film projections for performance by Pere Ubu. Queen Elizabeth Hall, London, 2008.
 Dormitorium. Rotterdam. The exhibition is currently touring and has been exhibited in Riga, Exeter, Lisbon, the Festival D'Avignon, Tokyo, Brighton, Philadelphia, New York City, Ithaca, N. Y., and Wrocław.
 Coffin of a Servant's Journey. Belsay Hall, Northumberland, UK, 2007.
 Eurydice, She So Beloved. Leeds Art Gallery, Leeds, UK, 2008.

VHS and DVD (a selection)

Licenses for some editions have expired and are no longer available for purchase, but they may be found in libraries.

The Brothers Quay, Vol. 1. VHS Region 2/ PAL. Connoisseur Video. Release date 2000.

The Brothers Quay, Vol. 2. VHS Region 1 / NTSC. 1991.

The Brothers Quay Collection: Ten Astonishing Short Films 1984–1993. DVD Region 1/ NTSC. Kino Video. Release date 2000. 120 minutes. ISBN 6305957681.

Quay Brothers: The Short Films, 1979–2003. DVD (2 discs) Region 2 / PAL. Published and distributed by the BFI. Release date 2006. 134 minutes (disc one) + 183 minutes (disc two). 24-page booklet. ISBN/EAN 5035673006535.

Quay Brothers: Die Kurzfilme, 1979–2003. (2 discs). DVD Region 2 / PAL. Absolut Medien GmbH. Release date 2008. 134 minutes (disc one) + 183 minutes (disc two). ISBN 978- 3898488420.

Phantom Museums: The Short Films of the Quay Brothers. (2 discs) DVD Region 1 / NTSC. Zeitgeist Films. Release date 2007. 134 minutes (disc one) + 183 minutes (disc two). 24-page booklet.

Courts métrages des frères Quay. (2 discs) DVD Region 2 / PAL. E.D. Distribution. Release date 2008. 134 minutes (disc one) + 183 minutes (disc two).

The Brothers Quay: de korte films, 1979–2003. PAL / REGION 0. Release date 2008. 135 mins (disc one) + 119 mins (disc two) 24 page booklet. ISBN 9789059391239.

Quay Brothers: Short Film Collection. DVD (2 discs boxed with booklet) Region MPEG - 2 / Tohokushinsha Film Corporation, Japan. 2 Discs with booklet. Color & b/w. Release date 2009.

Institute Benjamenta, or This Dream People Call Human Life. (1995) VHS PAL. ICA Projects Ltd. Release date 1996. B/w, 104 minutes.

Institute Benjamenta, or This Dream People Call Human Life. (1995) DVD Region 1 / NTSC. Kino. Release date 2000. B/w, 104 minutes. ISBN 630595769X.

Institute Benjamenta, or This Dream People Call Human Life. (1995) DVD and Blu-ray. BFI. Release date April 2010.

The PianoTuner of EarthQuakes. (2005) Zeitgeist Films. Region 1 / NTSC. Release date 2007. Color and b/w, 99 minutes.

The PianoTuner of EarthQuakes. (2005) DVD Region 2 / PAL. Artificial Eye. Release date 2006. Color and b/w, 99 minutes.

L'Accordeur de tremblements de terre. (2005) DVD Region 2 / PAL. E.D. Distribution. Release date 2007. Color and b/w, 99 minutes.

The PianoTuner of EarthQuakes. (2005). DVD (boxed with booklet) Region MPEG - 2. Tohokushinsha Film Corporation, Japan. Release date 2009. Color and b/w.

curriculum vitae 2008

Suzanne Helena Buchan
Born October 13, 1959 in Campbell River, Canada
Swiss/Canadian bi-national, Heimatort Rünenberg BL

Profile Summary

Currently Professor of Animation Aesthetics and Director of the Animation Research Centre, University for the Creative Arts UK. Since 2005 responsible for staff research culture development, external funding and RAE 2008. Founding Editor of *animation. an interdisciplinary journal* (Sage Journals) and a member of the AHRC Peer Review College. Extensive international UG and PG curriculum design and teaching experience with specialisms in Animation and Digital Media History, Theory and Aesthetics; Film Studies; Spectatorship, Ethics and Philosophy of Perception; Feminist Film Theory; Experimental and Avant-garde Film History, Theory and Aesthetics; Special Effects and CGI; Parametric Film Analysis; Curatorial Practice; James Joyce and Modernist Literature; PG Research Methods.

Research and publications focus on aesthetics and theory of film and animated media using interdisciplinary methodologies that incorporate discourses in cinema theory as well as phenomenology, architecture, fine art, sci-tech and literature. Also active as a consultant for moving image festivals and print and broadcast media. Founding member and 1994-2005 Co-Director of the FANTOCHE International Animation Film Festival in Baden, Switzerland. Curatorial highlights include the *Trickraum: Spacetricks* Exhibition at the Zurich Museum of Design August-November 2005 and the 2007 Pervasive Animation symposium at Tate Modern. Currently preparing an AFI Film Reader, *Pervasive Animation* (Routledge).

Education

2003	Preliminary conferment of doctoral degree (Dr. des.)
1994	Lizentiat in Cinema Studies with Prof. Christine N. Brinckmann: <i>Literary Cineantics: Cinematic Metamorphosis in James Joyce's Ulysses</i>
1989-1994	Studies of English Literature and Linguistics, Cinema Studies and Anthropological Psychology at the Humanities Faculty of the University of Zurich
1988-1989	Undergraduate studies at University of British Columbia, Vancouver: English, Philosophy, French, Theatre Studies and Stage Performance
1978-1982	Completion of additional high school qualifications in Mathematics and Human Biology Training and employment as pre-school teacher, Vancouver, Canada
1972-1977	Handsworth Secondary School, Vancouver, Canada. Graduate Distinction in Ceramics
1965-1972	Primary school in Prince George, Canada

Academic and Professional Appointments and Activities

2007-	Professor of Animation Aesthetics, University for the Creative Arts, UK
2006-	College Research Coordinator Reader in Animation Studies (.5 FTE) , and Director, Animation Research Centre, University College for the Creative Arts, UK
2004-2007	Reader in Animation Studies and Director, Animation Research Centre, University College for the Creative Arts, UK
2001	Tutor & Guest of honour at <i>Kraków Animation Film Workshop 2001</i> , Association of Animation, Experimental and Video Film Artists, Academy of Fine Arts Krakow

2000-2004	Senior Fellow, Director, Animation Research Centre, Surrey Institute of Art & Design, UK
1999	Guest Professor, Graduate seminar <i>Architecture and Cinema</i> , Technical University of Stuttgart, Department of Architecture, Stuttgart
1997-1999	Guest lecturer ('Dozentin') Art Academy of Zurich, Dept. of Film/Video
1995-2003	Co-Director and Founding Member of the <i>Fantoche</i> International Animation Film Festival, Baden, Switzerland. (Artistic Director 2003)
1994-2000	Research Assistant and Lecturer ('Dozentin'), Seminar for Cinema Studies, University of Zurich, Switzerland
1998	Guest Professor, Department of Film, Theatre and Creative Writing, University of British Columbia, Canada. Graduate Seminar: <i>The Animation Film: History, Techniques and Aesthetics</i>
1997	Jury member, Jury Chair for festivals (Solothurn, Leipzig, Ottawa, Norwich, Zurich, Stuttgart)
1995-2003	Member of the International Competition Selection Committee, <i>Fantoche</i> International Animation Film Festival, Baden

Academic and University Service (a selection)

2008	Lead Academic of 'The Manipulated Moving Image Cluster, UCA
2008	Founding Member, Ex-FM Experimental Film Interest Group, Society for Cinema and Media Studies
2007	Responsible for Farnham College RAE and collaborator on final UCCA RAE Submission, -Conference organisation of <i>Pervasive Animation</i> , Tate Modern, in collaboration with Stuart Comer, curator: Film, Tate Modern. total funding acquired: £36,540
2005	£219, 901 SRIF funding for the Animation Research Centre Archive, UCA, UK - Collaborator on the Surrey Institute's bid to HEFCE's Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) fund
2004-2003	Elected member of the Arts & Humanities Research Board (AHRC) Peer Review College Concept and organisation of <i>Animated 'Worlds'</i> Conference, Farnham, UK. Total acquired budget £13,880
2002-2005 since 2002-	Reader for the Irish Film Board UCA Research & Policy Development Committee; UCA RAE Subgroup Committee; UCA Research Degrees Committee
1999	Organisation, budget (PRO HELVETIA) and coordination of the Swiss participation and film programme at the <i>Refocussing</i> Conference of the Women's Centre for Gender Studies, University of British Columbia
1997-2000	Member of the Jury for Film Quality Awards, Swiss Federal Office of Culture, Department of the Interior

Academic Supervision and Examination

2006-2008	MPhil External Examiner, Glasgow School of Art
2003-	PhD supervisor, University for the Creative Arts
1999	Exam Expert of the Diploma Commission, Zurich Art Academy, Film/Video, summer exams

Scholarships and Residencies

1999	Mathilde-Planck-Lectureship Programme, Ministry for Science, Research and the Arts, Baden-Württemberg
1998	Scholar in Residence, Green College, Centre for Advanced interdisciplinary Scholarship, Faculty of Graduate Studies, University of British Columbia
1989-1994	City of Zurich, Student Grant award, CHF12,000 p.a. (total CHF72,000)

Select Publications

Founding Editor and Editor in Chief: *animation: an interdisciplinary journal*, SAGE Journals, ISSN: 1746-8477. 3x yearly
Editor: *Animated 'Worlds'*. London: John Libbey Publishing, 2006. ISBN: 0 86196 661 9
Co-Editor: *Fantoche International Animation Film Festival 2003*. Baden: Fantoche Verlag, 2003. ISBN: 3-9520962-3-7
Co-Editor: *Trickraum : Spacetricks*. Suzanne Buchan und Andres Janser (Eds.), German/English. Zurich/Basel: Museum für Gestaltung Zürich and Christoph Merian Verlag, 2005. ISBN 3-85616-253-4

Chapters in books

"Oscillating at the 'high/low' Art Divide: Curating and Exhibiting Animation," in: Rugg, Judith (Ed.) *Issues in Curating, Contemporary Art and Performance*, London: Intellect, 2008.
"The Animated Fulcrum", in: Betti-Sue Hertz (Ed), *Animated Painting*, San Diego Museum of Art, 2007.
"The Animated Spectator: Watching the Quay Brothers' 'Worlds'," in: *Animated 'Worlds'*, Suzanne Buchan (Ed.), Eastleigh: John Libbey Publishing, 2006.
"Mindscape, Spacetricks and Dreamscapes: the Artistic Imagination of Animation," in: *Trickraum : Spacetricks*. Suzanne Buchan und Andres Janser (Eds.), Zurich/Basel: Museum für Gestaltung Zürich and Christoph Merian Verlag, 2005.
"Uncanny Space, Narrative Place: The Architectural Imagination of Animation," in: *What is Architecture? / Text Anthology (Co To Jest Architektura?/Antologia tekstow)*, Adam Budak (ed.), Bunkier Sztuki Contemporary Art Gallery, Firma Wydawniczo-reklamowa RAM, Goethe Institut Inter Nationes Kraków 2002.
"D'un monde a l'autre: Art brut and die Collageanimationsfilme des Lausanner CERY-Spitals," in: *Home Stories. Neue Studien zu Film und Kino in der Schweiz*. Marburg: Schüren-Verlag, 2001.

Peer-review Journal Essays

'Extracinematic Animation: In conversation with Gregory Barsamian', in: *animation: an interdisciplinary journal*, SAGE Journals, Vol 4 No 3, November 2008, pp. 288-305.
'Exile, Identity, *cinéma des copines*: Women Filmmakers in Switzerland', in: *Senses of Cinema*, October 2002.
URL: <http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/02/22/swiss.html>. ISSN: 1443-4059
'Fantazje Filmowe. Wariacje Na Temat Ulisses.' ('Visionary Cineantics: Cinematic Artifice around Ulysses.'), in: *Kwartalnik Filmowy*, Nr 26-27, Summer/Autumn 1999. ISSN: 0452-9502
'Graphic and Literary Metamorphosis: Animation Technique and James Joyce's Ulysses'. In: *Animation Journal*, Vol. 7, No. 1, Fall 1998, pp. 21-34. ISSN: 1061-0308
'The Quay Brothers: Choreographed Chiaroscuro, Enigmatic and Sublime.' In: *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 51, Number 3, Spring 1998. ISSN: 0015-1386
'Cadavres exquis' i krolestwo wyobrazni – 'Ulica Krokodyli' oraz 'Instytut Benjamenta.' (Cadavres and Realms Exquises: 'The Street of Crocodiles' and 'The Institute Benjamenta.') In: *Kwartalnik Filmowy*, Nr 19-20, Winter 1997/Spring 1998. ISSN: 0452-9502

Curatorships

2008	<i>Bob Godfrey: Satire, Surrealism, Sex</i> , The Gallery, The Arts Institute at Bournemouth, UK
2007	<i>Animation, Artefact, Art: The Animation Research Centre Archive's Halas & Batchelor Collection and Bob Godfrey Studio</i> , Herbert Reed Gallery, Canterbury, UK
2005	<i>Spacetricks : Trickraum</i> , (co-curator with Andres Janser) Museum of Design Zurich
1995-	Concept, organisation and programme curation of animation film programmes for <i>Fantoche</i> (Baden) and international art house cinemas and festivals (Stuttgart, Norwich, Cardiff, Krakow, Vancouver, St Gallen, Canterbury)

A f f i l i a t i o n s

2003-	College Art Association, USA
2002-	Co-initiator and member of the UK Animation Group
1999-	Member Canadian Association of Cinema Studies
1998-	Member Green College Foundation , Canada
1997-	Member Society for Cinema and Media Studies
	Member Society for Animation Studies (SAS)
1995-	Member Society for Feminist Studies, Switzerland
1994-	Member Swiss Animation Film Group (STFG/GSFA)
	Member ASIFA